

Scriblerian Ethics: Encounters in Satiric Metamorphosis

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
English in the Graduate School  
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ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

“Scriblerian Ethics” proposes that the aesthetic and ethical standpoint of the writings of the Scriblerians (Pope, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, Oxford, Parnell) can be better understood through an attunement to their orientation towards the Longinian sublime and to the metamorphic poetics of Ovid. The project holds the negative and critical features of the group’s writing in abeyance, as it attempts to account for the positive, phenomenological concepts and features of Scriblerian satiric and non-satiric writing. The intensities and affiliations of Scriblerian writing that emerge from this study gesture aesthetically and ethically beyond historical subjectivity to an opening to alterity and difference. This opening or hope for the achievement ethical dimension of writing is divulged as the intimate motivation of the literary or aesthetic components that accompany the negative, referential, and critical features of Scriblerian writing.

Examining closely the major writings of Pope and Swift in conjunction with the collaborative writings of the Scriblerus club, the project describes the concern with temporality that emerges from Longinian and Ovidan influence; the Scriblerian reflexivity that culminates in a highly virtual aesthetics; and the ethical elaboration of an orientation toward hospitality that emerges from this temporal and virtual aesthetic orientation. A “Scriblerian ethics” is an affinity for a hospitality not yet achieved in political, economic, and cultural life. Finally, the project analyzes throughout its readings of Scriblerian writing the violence that nevertheless accompanies Scriblerian

aesthetics, examining the figures of modernity, criticism, and sexual violence (rape) that permeate Scriblerian texts as barriers or resistances to the achievement of an ethical orientation to alterity.

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expression of inexpressible obligation must be directed to Sarah Lincoln, with whom I have been immeasurably fortunate to have established friendship, love, intellectual conversation, and family life that exceed in every way my expectations and my definitions of the limits of those terms. The transports of our life together have been the inspiration for every element of this project.

# 1. Introduction

We need a new vocabulary for literary satire. It is not that the old set of concepts and interpretive frameworks is wrong, or to be dismissed, but that it largely treats one aspect of literary satirical aesthetics—its negativity. The view from this literary *via negativa* is that satire is primarily a form of critique directed at what it reveals to be shameful objective practices that demand reform, a mode of writing that establishes its own identity and function only in negation. This account of literary satire provides an opening for us to understand its very historical basis, an opportunity for literary historians to trace the origins of and causal relations between the satiric critique's references to the world. Numerous critics have expressed the ultimate insufficiency of the purely historicist focus on satiric negativity. But what has failed to come into view for the great examples and periods of literary satire is the question of what *remains*: what does the act of satire *do* other than negate, critique, reject, or shame? In one sense, this is a question of the literary character of the satiric act, a difficult question that should be asked of all literary production, as proposed most recently by the work in aesthetic ethics of Derek Attridge.<sup>1</sup> What makes satire literary, fictional, poetic, and oriented

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<sup>1</sup> See Derek Attridge. *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004).

towards an ethics, rather than something closer in affinity to agonistic, essayistic critique? Does satire have an ethical and aesthetic way of being in the world that might be articulated in distinction or in difference from the negativities that have been the dominant concern of the body of work of its critics?

Critical reflections on this question have invoked, quite rightly, the ambivalence of satiric personae, and the satiric investment in literary tradition. The best critics of these satiric features have illuminated the many difficulties of describing the positive features of satiric writing. But in general, the critical tendency is for accounts of satire's aesthetic and ethical features to dwell briefly on a phenomenological account before returning or converting this phenomenology to the necessities and disciplinarily determining limits of literary history. To recover a vocabulary with which we might turn from the disciplinary critical knowledge that has come to define satire for us, and toward those positive features of its performance, its way of being in the world, that have been inadequately articulated, we must return to this phenomenology with the renewed position that there is something to be gained by avoiding the quick reduction of satiric purpose to oppositions within the disciplinary knowledges of economic, political, or literary history. We must have a kind of patience that this too-disciplinary account of satire makes quite difficult for us to have.

The Scriblerians are one of the great case studies in this investigation of literary satire. The group, which usually is held to consist of Pope, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot,

Harley (Oxford), and Parnell, delineates a coherent period of satiric production anchored by a fairly consistent set of literary and political allegories. The writing of the group has come to represent the quintessence of Augustanism and Neo-Classicism as we have come to know these terms. Situating Scriblerian satire against “moderns” in literary production, Whigs in politics, and the emerging market economy of credit in economics, critics depict a body of literary output that for nearly the first half of the eighteenth century situated itself like no other production in opposition to the modern scene.

But with Scriblerian satire, as with many other periodized satiric or politically principled literary movements, the writers’ rejection of modernity is overwhelmingly taken to exhaust the writing’s reason for being. Having produced no straightforward or programmatically coherent literary manifesto, the Scriblerians (and satire more generally) are usually understood as politically and aesthetically reactionary, nostalgic for an unrecoverable past or seeking to bask in the fame that a proudly contentious but ultimately sterile anti-modern stance brings with it. In what follows I renew the project of articulating a phenomenology of Scriblerian satire first undertaken by Robert C. Elliot and Fredric Bogel, and more recently by Laura Brown and James Noggle. The accounts of Scriblerian satire that follow are an attempt to bring forward a vocabulary with which to discuss the aesthetic and ethical designs of the writing of the Scriblerians without quickly explicating these features into an account of the negativity of the historical

critique also present in the works. If Scriblerian satire performs an act of literary production in distinction from its act of criticism, it is only possible to revive the terms and stakes of this performance *on its own terms* if the negations of satire are put on hold, if historical reference and agon are not taken as the limits of the significance and effect of the satiric act. To recover a new vocabulary with which to understand satire, we must commit ourselves quite seriously to a phenomenological account of satire that attends to this writing as a set of performances, as ethical and aesthetic gestures, acts that may move in contrary motion to ineluctable modernity, but which nevertheless move with such a motion—such force and affect—that they deserve attention and description.

So if this is a project that begins to further a phenomenological analysis of the Scriblerians, it does not do so out of a belief that this phenomenology is the truth of their writing in *opposition* to biography, political history, economic history, or the features of the emerging literary marketplace. A focus on the autonomy of the aesthetic acts of satire would be to misunderstand the way in which the Scriblerians themselves understood the role of aesthetics. Rather than an array of autonomous disciplinary pathways that might act on each other only through mediation, aesthetics and those other features of modernity that would later (and for us) become disciplines are *entangled* here in the writing of the Scriblerians, inseparable and not disciplinarily differentiated. A phenomenology of Scriblerian writing will not therefore find in isolation purely aesthetic or ethical impulses, adrift in a kind of clear medium of

philosophical universalism. Aesthetics and ethics and their articulation in satire are, perhaps paradoxically, thoroughly tied to modernity, whose advent and ascendancy much Scriblerian critique is concerned to describe and attack. A phenomenological account must therefore preserve the role of the modern as a rhetorical presence—a trope—in order to allow the aesthetic and ethical features of Scriblerian writing to emerge with any clarity at all. In what follows, I hold in abeyance much of the historical detail of the Scriblerian critique of modernity while preserving its effects of rhetorical force, its presence as a crucial feature of their performance of aesthetic and ethical difference or alterity.

What follows is a phenomenology of Scriblerian writing that has no faith in phenomenology's access to presence: what this way of reading allows us with regard to the Scriblerians is a glimpse at the only articulations of aesthetics and ethics in their work, which is to say, articulations that are thoroughly entangled and inseparable from other articulations that often make clarity on this matter impossible. And indeed, the Scriblerians themselves write within a set of literary, political, and philosophical traditions that demand that true ethical foundations must elude representation in order to have profound force and effect in the world. As inheritors of skepticism, a secularizing iconoclasm (shared even by Pope, whose Catholicism is well known), and as critics of the emerging disciplinarity of modernity, the Scriblerians shared an opposition toward a reified or doctrinaire program of aesthetic or ethical philosophy.

Rather, what a more phenomenological approach allows us to glimpse is that their writing is a performative counteraction of what they did not like in modern life. Their writing, in its attunements, its energies, and its rhetorical forces, orients the reader toward both a negative experience of modernity—one that can be articulated quite well as a matter of critique—and towards the act of satire or Scriblerian writing itself. Not only does Scriblerian writing forego an elaboration of its own most positive features for the sake of simply performing itself, but it notoriously, more often than not, takes itself and the occasion of its production as its very concern. Scriblerian writing is highly reflexive, intensely concerned with the act of writing and reading, and constantly attends to this encounter in both its features of form and content. It is here, in the encounter between writer, reader, and text, that Scriblerian writing unfolds a set of powerful aesthetic concerns and an ethics of alterity that would preserve the very openness and transformative potential of encounter at the moment of this textual conjunction as the only basis for an aesthetic ethics.

### ***1.1. Scriblerian Modernity***

What is the modernity depicted by the Scriblerians? One way to begin to elaborate it is to examine the critique of knowledge that they began to articulate both individually and as a coterie. Based on their group productions beginning in 1715, their chief complaint is that learning had begun to be abused. Or, one should say, given that

this complaint is itself a repetition, it had begun to be abused *again*. The pedants were back. From the perspective of the righteous, those who considered themselves defenders of culture, this wasn't the first time that academics, scholars, theologians or scientists had threatened the success of humanism by flaunting the dogmatic improprieties of pedantry. According to their critics, pedants had been cropping up for centuries—we can look back to Dryden, Cervantes, Erasmus, Rabelais, or even glance as far back as Lucian, for accounts of modern learning taken to objectionable extremes. Every tipping point into so-called modernity has brought with it a plague of what has been exposed as a pedantic enthusiasm, perhaps in penance for the excesses of knowledge and hubris that abound at the arrival of the modern, or as anxiety for the ramifications of a revolutionary spirit. And so it was in 1715—in fact, abuse of learning had reached such a pitch that even *virtual* men were beginning to appear whose pedantic enthusiasm enabled them to dogmatically cite the ancient documents of wisdom and write zealous criticism with more fervor than real men. Or, just the opposite, virtual critics who could remain wisely aloof, satirizing by means of reflection and judgment, helping their readers find their way to reasonable refinement in a complicated culture. Mr. Spectator and his contingent of varied wits are one example of the latter type of virtual man, a modern fiction in which the figure of the audience is the recipient of the gift of advice embedded in responses to the satiric fictions of “real” letters and essays offered by fictional readers. But more thoroughly virtual, rather than fictional, is the figure of

Martinus Scriblerus as developed by Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot, Gay, and their collaborators. Emerging from what these satirists represent as the cusp or precipice of modernity, Scriblerus operates as a personification of the crisis of modernity itself, a figure for the “zero point” that bridges the gap between the image of a past now becoming eclipsed by an emerging future.<sup>2</sup>

*The Spectator* is satiric and often indirect in its aims, caught up as it is within these distancing maneuvers of virtuality and pseudonym. But *The Spectator*, according to its own statements and its methods, also has its eye on reform, and this ejects its concerns from what might otherwise be a completely embedded recursion in virtuality, indicating time and again that there are cultural intentions at work that seek to produce their specified reforms among the periodical’s readership. That other virtual man, exemplified by Martinus Scriblerus, born in 1715 as the *homonculus* of the Scriblerus club, is much more disconcerting in his relation to modernity and to reality. His (and Cornelius, his father’s) abuse of learning is unrepentant—he is, like Quixote with his romances, fully enmeshed in his superficial and dogmatic approach to the apparatus of

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<sup>2</sup> By “zero point” I have in mind Rose A. Zimbardo’s excellent analysis of the skepticism and satire of Rochester and his moment in *At Zero Point: Discourse, Culture and Satire in Restoration England* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998). While I find Zimbardo’s argument about the importance of Rochester as symptomatic poet of modernity compelling, I find the Scriblerian emphasis on virtuality and intensity to indicate a further winnowing of the elements of Rochester’s metaphysics—especially with regard to his conception of bodies and sexuality.

scholarly tradition—apparently for its own sake.<sup>3</sup> He is a virtual man whose only concern is that virtuality, which is to say, the recursive relations of writer to writing, reader to reading, and the emergent properties of those collaborations. Far more than Mr. Spectator, Martin Scriblerus is the figure of a humanity that now considers subjectivity as *itself* an emergent property of the acts of reading and writing performed by (or, more accurately, forming through performance) individuals, even if that subjective construction is being simultaneously “satirized” by its Scriblerian embodiment.

I will ultimately argue here and throughout the chapters that follow that the Scriblerian form of satire, despite its affinity for ridiculing virtual pedants, is an aesthetic practice that attempts to perform a virtualized and virtualizing subjectivity in contrast or in distinction to forms of identity and selfhood represented by emerging literary forms (such as the novel) that establish individuality as a role *opposed* to virtuality. Scriblerus, and the satire of the Scriblerians in general, performs the emergence of subjectivity as virtual effect, denying through this continually ongoing depiction of process (the core of the Scriblerian satiric aesthetic) that individuality, or the role of the subject as such, is

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<sup>3</sup> We should consider Isaac Bickerstaff to be a preliminary draft of Scriblerus, who seems to have remained “alive” for the group until the very end, unlike Bickerstaff, who was abandoned by Swift after he had served his purpose and taken up later by Steele in humorous reference to the crisis produced by Bickerstaff’s initial appearance. See George P. Mayhew. “Swift’s Bickerstaff Hoax as an April Fools’ Joke.” *Modern Philology* 61.4 (1964).

something that preexists the entanglement of activity with the world that surrounds it. In his contrast to Mr. Spectator, Martinus Scriblerus offers a thoroughly performative individual identity, emphasizing through this performance the implications of the metaphysical presence of the individual subject in Whig satire, or in the emerging personal and characterological narratives of the novel. Modernity has reached its cusp, its zero point, because, for the Scriblerians, individuality has become *formed* rather than *performed*, offering the individual as a set of thoroughly historical results that could be traced by way of narrative. Martinus Scriblerus embodies both a thoroughly “modern” selfhood, in which all elements of the construction of individual character can be calculated and made the subject of psychological or historical inquiry, *and* the satire of such an individuality. This satiric element, which itself operates as performance rather than explicit critique, enacts the way in which despite this modern calculability, a rampant set of uncontrolled features and actions continually bursts the seams of the modern self, reasserting again and again the irreducibility and the incalculability of performance. We are offered, through the rhetorical and aesthetic features of Scriblerian satire, a glimpse at a subjectivity that only exists *beyond* identity, in the entangled interaction between self and world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Here, for lack of a vocabulary with which to explain the Scriblerian satiric gesture, I am forced to look to Heidegger, whose conceptions of being-in-the-world, thrownness, and entanglement are, in my opinion, repetitions of the very concerns expressed against the figure of modernity by the Scriblerians in the early eighteenth century. I am not attempting to reduce the Scriblerians to a Heideggerian theoretical position (a

This conjunction and contrast, Scriblerus and modernity, are my concern here, and my goal is to elaborate, without becoming reductive, what it is that enables the elusiveness and power of the Scriblerian satiric aesthetic. From our literary-historical position, it is striking to note that the Scriblerians' body of work has, far more than its Whig satirical contemporaries, become canonized as literature—and indeed, was in some ways the very *model* of literary discourse and literary canon that nevertheless emerged *avant la lettre*, before the existence of the varying institutions that we think of as Literature.<sup>5</sup> Why and how can satire as such occupy such a prominent place within the emergence of a national (i.e. British) literary canon?

Scriblerian satire poses difficulties for these considerations, operating in opposition to the more reform- and critique-minded satires of the enthusiastically

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prospect of application that would be thoroughly opposed to Heidegger's writing in any case, and would effectively reinscribe within it everything it opposes). Rather, I am proposing again, as with the repetitions of pedantry with which I started the chapter, a repetitious upswelling of an opposition to "modernity" that stages at the level of the individual self a rejection of the modern in favor of that which the modern has effaced. It is not nostalgia, however, because, as I hope to explain, within the terms of this conflict, nostalgia is a feature of "modernity." The satiric subjectivity is opposed ultimately to both "ancients" and "moderns." See in any case Martin Heidegger and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), especially (for "entanglement"), 164ff.

<sup>5</sup> Whether this canonization is deserved or not is here irrelevant—the Scriblerians model of writing fit well enough with the historical negotiation of the institution of Literature to find its niche. For a critique of the construction of the literary canon through an exclusion of Whig aesthetics, see Abigail Williams. *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

modern Whigs. Indeed, many common-sense definitions of satire effectively avoid dealing with the constitutive ambivalences of the Scriblerians—proposing rather that satire seeks to communicate and bring into the world a set of corrections or reforms, and that it is thus engaged in negating the decadent elements of culture in the name of a proper morality or purity—a socially-minded literature, like much of that produced during the period (satiric or not), a literature concerned with the problem of value. And indeed, the satires of the Scriblerians are full of reference to figures whose function in the text seems to be precisely this kind of critique.<sup>6</sup> But an exclusive focus on the referentiality of Scriblerian satire, taken as a way of grounding the writing in contemporary and “real” concerns, would utterly disable the text from the perspective of our own understanding of literary aesthetics. Instead I propose that the massive regime of references and citations that populate Scriblerian texts are mobilized in order to bring attention to contemporaneity as such—to the problems of temporality in the construction of the self. Despite the dogmatic and pedantic way in which Scriblerus engages texts, his aims are made to miscarry by the recurrence of his overflowing virtuality, a effervescence that recurs in many guises in Scriblerian satire—some ridiculous, but some far more dignified and eminent. And this referentiality, rather than

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<sup>6</sup> As for “reference,” see Margaret Anne Doody, who notes that on the surface, “English Augustan poets” appear to “draw on the world, the ‘real’ world.” *The Daring Muse : Augustan Poetry Reconsidered*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 119.

working to redirect us to an empirical assessment of the world of writing, reinscribes the power of the present moment so that it can only be accessed through writing, and as a matter of writing—writing that comments on writing.

Despite its engagement with reference to “reality,” Scriblerian satire performs again and again the proposition that reality is primarily virtual—an effect of practices of writing—and that the only reform that might be produced from within this mode of satire is one that is in its essence precisely Scriblerian—which is to say, *of writing*, or, misdirected toward an external realm, “scribbling,” one of the inauthentic versions of that act. The literary character of much of the reference is a strategy of containment (of the practices of “scribbling”) that exposes the limits of the new literary marketplace and the surrounding sphere of financialization. But it is also a strategy that enacts performance of “proper” literary encounters and exchanges even as it represents those that fail to operate in this way. The performative nature of the satire, in which the positive element refuses to speak its name (almost never even mentioning the word satire, much less any other methodological label), is the Scriblerian assertion of a skeptical aesthetics that holds out hope for an ineffable yet unrepresentable possibility only available in encounter, in the various nexuses of literature.

We can agree with Reuben Brower’s classic analysis of Pope’s writing as a “poetry of allusion,” but we must modify the concept of allusion by thinking of Freud’s use of the word in a pertinent text for satire, *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious*.

For Freud, allusion [*Anspielung*] (in the joke, but also more broadly) is both a matter of presence—a pointer to another thought, word, or text that can *in effect* (i.e. virtually) make it present. But the effect of presence produced by allusion is predicated, for Freud, on a skillfully concealed absence. He proposes that “[i]n fact, in every allusion something is being omitted, that is, the train of thought leading to the allusion. It depends only on which is the more obvious—the gap in the wording of the allusion or the substitute which partly fills the gap.”<sup>7</sup>

But Scriblerian writing, as we will see, plays on and in this “gap” without giving away the effective aspects of allusion. The missing *process*—in other words, the production of the literary text, the process of authorship—is still concealed. But this concealment bears up more than the regime of referential allusion to a canon of classical or contemporary literary references. Allusion in Scriblerian writing offers the sacrifice and excision of the *technē* of literary authorship (Freud’s omitted “train of thought”) for the sake of the relentless appearance of encounter, of reference. What is unique to Scriblerian writing is both its thorough saturation with allusion, and the way in which it enables allusion to operate as *encounter*—rather than as a scheme of stabilizing

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<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. trans. Joyce Crick (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 65. Cited as “Joke” in the text hereafter. For Brower, see *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959). My theory of the allusiveness of Scriberian writing does not dismiss the excellent work done by Brower, but rather seeks to explain its importance, and the vital place of allusion in the satiric and other writing of Pope, Swift and their circle.

genealogical reference—by way of an attention to the rhetorical techniques of sublimity, which, as they followed from Longinus, emphasized the strategies of temporally-oriented heightening and intensification. The poetry of allusion is, in the hands of the Scriblerians, a poetics that agrees with Freud that allusion operates as a deferral, because, after all, “when the technique is dismantled, the joke is spoiled” (*Joke* 61). But this deferral is staged in the form of a positive textual construction—equivalent, in some ways, to the construction of the joke, for Freud. The satiric text is not a text oriented to deferral *per se*, but to the performance of a kind of differential textuality that will *allow the deferral to persist*—that will, through the mobilization of metamorphic reference, prevent the emergence of the true origin of the text, whether this would take the form of its argument, its motivation, or the author’s intention.

This allusive recursion that entangles the world of discourse with the world that it references is figured again and again in Scriblerian satire. This consistent concern with the problem of strategy in engaging the world results in repeated evocations of other figures, as well, figurations of difference that are recursive in the same way: tropes of *autopoietic* processes or practices which the Scriblerians repeatedly mobilize as ancillary but necessary elements in their satiric aesthetic. As I treat throughout what follows, the figures of Ovidian metamorphoses, the figure of woman, and the figure of modernity itself are offered by the Scriblerians as an engagement with the prospect of realms of human practice that, despite entanglements, have become largely autonomous and self-

generating. While it could be said, from the perspective of literary history, that Scriblerus and the satire of the Scriblerians represent an intermediate stage between the thorough entwinement of art and poetry with other practices or with ritual (i.e. the expectation of mixed function as norm) and the separation of art from other social practices into a realm of relative autonomy, it must also be added that the aesthetics of the Scriblerians is thoroughly opposed to the very aesthetic autonomy that it appropriates in order to perform its satiric “point.”

Many critics have focused on the conservative elements in Scriblerian satire—the labels “Tory satire” and “Augustan satire” are the two major examples of names for their writing that suggest political, historical and moral affiliations—and to be sure, these descriptions are accurate in many ways. While I will begin to revise these political judgments here, I don’t wish to remake the Scriblerians into misunderstood aesthetic heroes in order to radicalize eighteenth-century studies. But despite its very real affiliations with conservative ideals, Scriblerian satire’s distance or difference from social life is not motivated primarily by classicism, nostalgia, or misogyny, even though these are ways that these writers often figure major facets of their concern. Rather, the Scriblerians’ concern resides primarily at the level of poetics, asserting that it is a concern with the very scene of the conjunction of language with writing and reading subjects that is at the root of the complex political imbrications of their satire. The poetic act is the kernel of the social, or a competing version of it, for the Scriblerians.

Rather than engaging in a critique of social practices in order to change those practices, Scriblerian satire focuses its critique at the very conjunction of language and the subject. At stake is the possibility of poetic practice itself—not a pure poesis free from the determinations of the modern, but of a thoroughly entangled poetics in which the various practical fetishes of the contemporary aesthetic moment can be shown to be insufficient. Accompanying and always threatening poetic practice are the fetishizations of pedants, dogmatists, scribblers, dunces, false wits, critics, publishers, poets laureate and, quite often, the general onward press of decadent humanity. In the chapters that follow, I will excavate these elements of the Scriblerian critique, elements which work to make the poetic act both autonomous from *and* fundamental to everything from the figures of politics, to beauty, to the city of London itself that occur in the poetry.

To most properly explain the concerns with identity, entanglement, poetics, and language that energized Scriblerian writing, I will begin by examining a contemporary neo-classical influence that helped germinate the Scriblerians' satiric aesthetic. Thus I propose in the first chapter that the acidic ambivalence with which Scriblerian satire greets the world is present in their texts as an internalization of the principles of the Second Sophistic poetics of Longinus that became highly popular in French and English letters in the late seventeenth century. Not at all the manual for rhetorical technique as it has been considered by many, Longinus' *Peri Hypsous* (most often translated into English as *On the Sublime*) works to deny rational analysis of the poetic act, and to

situate the fundamental element of this act at the very moment of encounter, the instant at which the non-linguistic feature of writing takes the shapeless form (a figure of ineffability) of an opening to the sublime affect or transport that can be exchanged between writer and reader. For the Scriblerians, satire stimulates an imagined but situated crisis in the world, a crisis that locates this power not in any reality objectified by satire, but in that entanglement performed by the satire that actively resists reduction to either the objective situation or a subjective knowledge of the world. Instead, the power of writing emerges from the preservation of sublime possibility within the act itself, preserving the possibility that such an act can exert a rhetorical force that is not extractable in the form of a pure reason or cognition, and which asserts that the ineffable transport available through the literary act is the proper way in which the subject can be formed as an immersed and entangled social being in the world.

The Scriblerian critique of modernity asserts that the feature of subjective and communicative excess that properly grounds subjectivity will disappear as poetics and its sublimity are remade in the image of knowledge. I operate largely from within the implicit position that, despite some reservations about seamlessly identifying “our” modernity with that of these prophetic utterances, in the birth of the institutional form of canonical literature, the prophetic concerns of the Scriblerians proved largely correct, and their role within the Literary canon has required the diminution of their satire’s

poetic concerns, which no longer resonate with the relevance they once had, in order to reinscribe them within the institutional functions of that discourse.

## **1.2. Outline of Topics**

In Chapter One, I connect the imitative, neoclassical aesthetics of translation described so well by critics such as Howard D. Weinbrot with the performative, anti-prescriptive notions of imitation found in Longinus' *Peri Hypsous—On the Sublime*. I argue that Scriblerian imitation is a generic behavior that attempts to achieve the imitative access to sublimity described by Longinus. Scriblerian writing makes prominent use of the rhetorical temporality of *kairos* celebrated in *Peri Hypsous*, organizing itself in part as a production of heightened occasion—satire as the moment of intervention or decision in which the modern crisis must be faced. Reading Swift's *Battle of the Books*, Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, and the Scriblerian *Peri Bathous*, I examine the Scriblerian confrontation with modernity as the production of a rhetorical, Longinian sublimity, a sublimity that recurs as a vital component of all Scriblerian writing.

This aesthetic devotion to sublimity is also an ethical devotion to the destabilization of subjectivity and aesthetic encounter described by Longinus as a crucial feature of a sublime aesthetics. Aesthetic transport is, for the Scriblerians, the ethical component of writing in which the radical difference possible in an encounter between reader and text is preserved. An aesthetics of sublime transport is an aesthetics devoted

to openness in an encounter with alterity. Modernity is figured in Scriblerian writing as that set of forces that closes down and instrumentalizes these aesthetic and ethical possibilities, reducing experience of alterity to the Dulness of the cultural same. The Scriblerians perform a dedicated opposition to this feature of modernity, both criticizing its anti-sublimity and foreclosure of transport, and enacting opposite modes of intensity and temporality that attempt to preserve the possibility of a Longinian aesthetic ethics in the early eighteenth century.

This account of an aesthetics of sublime imitation first travels through Roland Barthes' theoretical account of the "Death of the Author," proposing that Scriblerian writing, especially in its dedication to the sublime, proleptically echoes Barthes' depiction of a moment when intention and writing are delinked. Barthes' perspective might be said to be shared by the Scriblerians because their writing, and their aesthetic commitments, are in my reading proto-phenomenological in their method and their orientation. Scriblerian writing is reflexively aware of how the act of writing generates its "world" in the moment of encounter between writer, language, and, in a deferred moment, reader. Its ethical commitments are directed toward a critique of subjectivity that would reorient the notion of the subject to one of textual encounter as well. Beginning with Barthes allows us to see how critics who read the Scriblerians in entirely biographical or historical terms miss these phenomenological components of their writing. In the name of translating their approach to textuality solely into the production

of knowledge and the specificity of historical negation and critique, critics not attuned to the performative and phenomenological orientation of the Scriblerians perform a significant violence of reduction to their texts.

In the second chapter, I add a further temporal dimension to the Scriblerians' Longinian aesthetics by elaborating the ways in which the repetition of an attention to Ovidian metamorphoses produces a set of emergent aesthetic and ethical features in their writing. Ovidian repetitions and transformations allow the articulation of virtual textuality, embodied for the Scriblerians in the figure of Martinus Scriblerus; in their thoroughly reflexive concern with the act of writing, and of textuality itself as the topic of their writing; and in their concerns for the ways in which aesthetic energies and intensities might be brought into being through a repetition and redoubling of the experiences of sublimity as *kairos* and transport. I illustrate the ways in which this Ovidian dimension of Scriblerian aesthetics opposes a classical, Aristotelian theory of *anagnorisis* (recognition) in plot that recuperates aesthetic intensities for a textual economy that culminates in moral education and catharsis. Performing in opposition to this a recurrent set of metamorphic transformations, and the consequent refusal of recognition and catharsis, Scriblerian writing dedicates itself to an aesthetics of sublimity by repeatedly, metamorphically, transforming access to this sublimity, in a translational and transitional chain without end.

In this chapter, I undertake an extended reading of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, emphasizing the ways in which Ovidian metamorphosis adds a second dimension to Longinian sublimity, producing a poetic and satiric attention to an emergent virtuality within the intensities of social life. These performances of metamorphic sublimity contrast with the features of a modernity that the poem, and Scriblerian poetics more generally, figures rhetorically as a moment of the impending *end* to all such transformative sublimity. *The Rape of the Lock* is satirical, but it is also a very concerted and serious examination of what it might mean to bring into social encounter the transporting and transforming intensities of the sublime; it is also a critique of the ways in which the contemporary moment of modernity was, in its aesthetic orientation, opposed to this transformative sublimity.

Our approach to the description of the Longinian and Ovidian dimensions of Scriblerian writing allows us to produce a reading, in Chapter 3, of the most canonical and resonant text of Scriblerian satire, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Here, when attention to the text's reflexive Scriblerian methods is allowed to dominate our focus, what emerges is a quasi-allegorical questioning of the role of satire itself in relation to other modes of writing, and in relation to the discourses of power, politics, economics, and philosophy. *Gulliver's Travels* is concerned with the character progress of Scriblerian aesthetics itself through the temptations and resistances posed by the scene of modernity. Because this long meditation on the place of satire is concerned with a relation between writing

practice and an enveloping social milieu, we find the problems of the progress of satire configured as difficulties and questions of hospitality. The concern of *Gulliver's Travels* for the hospitable relationship between writing and its others travels along a sweeping gradient, allowing readers of Swift's text to consider the phenomena of hospitality in a range of settings, from strictly specific historical context to the most abstract and dehistoricized of encounters between self and other. *Gulliver's Travels* is a meditation on British political, economic, and colonial history, and it is a meditation on the aesthetic and ethical features of subjectivity in these contexts; this range of consideration of the permutations of these encounters takes place on the phenomenological terrain of hospitality.

Finally, our concern with the Scriblerian attention to encounter through emphasis on reflexivity, virtuality, sublimity, and hospitality allows us, or rather, begs us to ask the question of the role of violence in this persistent set of aesthetic investigations. Turning to the question of sexual violence and its narration, Chapter 4 examines the relationship between the ways in which encounters of violent or threatening sexuality are narrated and the effects of this narration on the Scriblerian aesthetic ethics we have thus far described. I examine here three general tendencies or categories in the figuration and narration of these encounters of violent or threatening sexuality in the Augustan moment: the "she-tragedy" of Nicholas Rowe, the scandalous novel of "amorous intrigue" of Eliza Haywood, and the critique of these prior forms of

sexualized narration that culminates in Samuel Richardson's masterpiece *Clarissa*. This comparison allows us to further articulate the Scriblerian figure of impending modernity as one of sexualized violence, as an encounter of rape or seduction that, in its ramifications for the subject, instrumentalizes or fetishizes troublingly hypostatized features of the self. Scriblerian restaging of these encounters attempts to re-emphasize the necessity for an aesthetics and ethics that would emerge from a Longinian sublime—while differing from the “amorous” version of sublimity promoted by Haywood. *Clarissa* is both an extension of the Scriblerian concern with these narrative encounters and a repudiation of the sublime Scriblerian and Longinian aesthetics, and I bring this forth by reading the text in conjunction with a work of aesthetic theory addressed originally to Richardson, Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*.

Throughout this study I am deeply indebted to three works that situate themselves as interventions in phenomenological philosophy. It is my deepest regret that I could not make this survey of Scriblerian aesthetics into a simultaneous investigation of the problems of phenomenology, including its articulation as the question of Being, the question of the other, and the question of violence. Nevertheless, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* and Jacques Derrida's “Violence and Metaphysics” all stand prominently behind my thought as I've begun to address what I see to be largely an eighteenth-century aesthetic intervention

that articulates some of the very same concerns brought into philosophy by these later thinkers.<sup>8</sup> My debt to these works demands far more articulation than it has received here, but the demand of a literary-historical thesis has prevented the elaboration of the philosophical component of these questions. That will necessarily be the work of a later date. What I have been able to produce is an articulation of aesthetic phenomenology inspired by these theoretical works without relying on their concepts as rigid determinations. Concerned to practice something akin to what Theodor Adorno calls “immanent critique,”<sup>9</sup> I have tried to allow the texts themselves to articulate the pathways and limitations of their own conceptualization, whether in content or form, of the possibilities of an aesthetic ethics, even as I have been aware that my own conceptual limitations inevitably come to bear determinately on every word that I write. As with the phenomenological biases of the writing I have undertaken to describe in literary historical terms here, what I have performed is this entanglement rather than its transcendence or idealist supersession.

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time. A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996); Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); “Violence and Metaphysics” in Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 97-192.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Theodor W Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1974), 30, where Adorno articulates what immanent critique might mean in terms of Hegelian idealism.

## 2. The Longinian Sublime, Scriblerian Repetition, and the Openness of Writing

### 2.1. Scriblerus, Still-Born

We can begin with a suitably *modern* moment: the death of the author. Was it an event? Even those who might say that the rhetorical problem of intentional fallacy comes to the field of criticism at a particular moment sound uncertain about giving it a truly historical or temporal status—for Barthes, even, it seems to have always already happened, both the basic feature of an emergent modernity and that which signals the continuity of the *longue duree*.<sup>1</sup> But whatever its historical status, whether it is a structural feature or an event, a noun or a verb, its elaboration as a concept within the vocabulary of criticism indicates a change in the perception of the past. Barthes observes that the loss of faith in intention and biography in our own time has been engaged differently in other moments and other writing, and that this engagement is neither primary nor secondary, but in fact takes place at the site of the mingling of writing and methodology—literature and criticism, authorship and parasitism, creation and response, are “now” (in the “modern” moment) brought together in one act of writing.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes. *Image, Music, Text*. trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-8. See also William K. Wimsatt. *The Verbal Icon; Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. ([Lexington]: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3-20.

Barthes' description of the shifting engagement with authorship is presented to us as an epochally modern moment—it is Mallarmé, in Barthes' account, who “was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner” (143). If the death of the author is the beginning of the epoch when a kind of writing emerges in which “language alone acts,” “performs,” and not “oneself” (143) in a modern scene of writing in which the will of the author has been historicized into myth, then it is fitting that this small essay has been interpreted by at least one critic as a Swiftian satire that ridicules the tendencies of the very modernity it announces. For, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, Swift and his methodological allies the Scriblerians were practitioners of a kind of satire whose concerns were indeed the way in which language could be said to perform its own self-animation.<sup>2</sup> Writing what in itself might be understood as a second-order rewriting of Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, J.C. Carlier depicts “The Death of the Author” as a deliberately hyperbolic satirization of the New Critics' tendency to make the intentional fallacy into a fetish.<sup>3</sup> In short, by finding in the essay the willing trace of

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<sup>2</sup> For more direct commentary on the work of Swift, see especially Chapter 3, where I deal at length with *Gulliver's Travels* as an extended meditation on the nature of satire itself and its situation as textual practice between parasitism and hospitality.

<sup>3</sup> Carlier writes: “Just as Swift's narrators would carry a satirised idea from the starting point of plausibility to a climax of derangement, so the fictional narrator created by Barthes is characterised as one whose dementia breaks through the initially plausible guise.” J. C. Carlier. “Roland Barthes's Resurrection of the Author and Redemption of Biography.” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 29.4 (2000) , 388.

the man who signed the name Barthes, Carlier proposes that we refuse to abandon a commitment to the intentions that provide occasion for the text, even if the “outside” to which these intentions direct us, or in which they reside, is never certain. And in reintroducing intention in order to identify the text as satire, Carlier is asserting that satire counters the modern moment of the death of the author by reinscribing reference, by refusing to allow the deterritorialization of the social function of criticism, and by preserving the “real” as a possible origin or foundation of the field of the textual.

Carlier’s text stages the old satiric form of the paradox, offering incommensurate interpretive aporia in the place of certain truth.<sup>4</sup> By asserting his thesis through a series of tautological restatements, Carlier argues that the two modes of reading Barthes’ essay are fundamentally opposed, and that no argument can be offered by the literal readership that would refute or synthesize the difference of the two readings, leaving us with the need for a generic understanding that would bridge this gap—a service performed by the paradoxical function of satire. Carlier claims that “literal” readers who believe in the text as a mimetic analysis of the field of writing are trapped in their textuality by their inability to claim that Barthes *didn’t* intend his text as satire (or to

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<sup>4</sup> Dustin Griffin writes of the term paradox that “as late as Johnson it carried within it the notion of a challenge to ‘received opinion,’ as para-dox challenges ortho-dox.” Rather than a mere duality, however, the older form of paradox flirted with absurdity. See Dustin Griffin. *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 53 and ff.

make any claim of intention at all). Thus, postmodern literary critics are so devoted to their philosophy (significantly linked, Carlier hints, by Paul de Man to Nazism) that they can't take a joke, especially when the joke's on them.

But Carlier here makes several assumptions about the role of satire in Barthes' essay and more generally—assumptions that have been taken for granted by many others; assumptions that I will continue to query and explore throughout the course of what follows. Perhaps most notably, he assumes that in depicting the “death of the author,” Barthes offers a statement of truth about objective reality. At question is the issue of whether Barthes' ideas of language (beginning with his account of the “death” itself) will allow his essay to make claims about an extra-textual world at all. I propose that unlike the objectively realist function of satire envisioned by Carlier, Barthes' text does indeed share an affinity with a Swiftian mode of writing, in which access to the world is extravagantly performed as only available through the world as figure, as an effect of its presence in texts, making the notion of satire's corrective function impossible to correlate with the world outside of its bounds.<sup>5</sup>

In Barthes' account, the crucial experience of the author's death occurs at the very moment of writing as encounter, the act of writing or of reading in which texts are

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<sup>5</sup> Here I again offer Dustin Griffin, who outlines a history of critical approaches to the moral standpoint of satire, noting that the “conventional” view(s) of satire has avoided taking seriously its own refusal to offer serious and productive moral foundations or judgments. See *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, 35-9 and ff.

constituted and language performs its eruption into subjectivity — “[l]inguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing” (145). The key linguistic elements of the encounter are understood by Barthes as performatives, and as such have the quality of self-reference that makes the concept of an “exterior” to language largely irrelevant.<sup>6</sup> This is Barthes’ most direct identification of modernity as such—it is the epoch in which writing becomes only able to enact itself and its reference performatively, or in which we are only able to understand writing by means of its performative functions. In this mode of reading, truth becomes itself a product of performative linguistic acts whose very trace of externality in the form of reference is itself the citation of a prior performance of that trace. “Truth,” in this sense, is neither mimetic reflection nor firm materiality, except as these are modes of engagement with the act of writing.

Building on his assertion of satire’s grounding in objective realism, Carlier also assumes that Swiftian satirical writing is a mode of critique whose intention is to produce a distinction between proper and improper interpretive schemes.<sup>7</sup> In Barthes’

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<sup>6</sup> For the most relevant and cogent discussion of “performative” as I use it here, see “Signature Event Context” in Jacques Derrida. *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1-24, as well as Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-57.

<sup>7</sup> “Critique” is something of an anachronism when applied to Swift—the term (as noun, as I use it here) is traced by the *OED* to Addison, for whom it represented something of a genre or mode, similar to the Whig mode of satire that Addison helped to generate. Use of it in a more abstract sense was not common until sometime much later in the century. It was, however, present in French in the preceding century as a version of the word “critic”. Addison and critique will appear later in this chapter. “Critic” and “criticism” were

rewriting of Swift, satire is “the litmus test of critical and theoretical competence. Those who take it literally are the unperceptive who fail, automatically, that test. Those who take it ironically and recognise a work of fine satiric fiction are those who pass the test; and arguably they alone fully appreciate the merits of the author, Roland Barthes” (393). “Full appreciat[ion]” (or rather, experience of the human presence that supports the writing) is only available to those who can move beyond textuality to be “redeemed” by satire’s faith in reference and truth. Literalists who fail to read this text satirically are rendered fully impotent by this satiric redemption, unable to make an intervention that would counter the claim that the text is satire and its object is truth. “Swiftian” satire, in the implicit elements of Carlier’s argument, thus defends us from the death of the author by avowing this very death hyperbolically and then by isolating this phenomenon within the nihilistic and, most importantly, now mute, realm of the aesthetic—which is to say, the mode of reading that could allow for the complete fissure between text and its origin. Carlier proposes that we remember satire as we read Barthes—it will remind us of our faith in literature’s “purchase on reality” by means of a reinstatement of reference and a reclamation of the truth from the jaws of voracious textuality.

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both more closely aligned with the role of an expert in the judgment of taste (and the performance or citation of that role) than in the confrontation and negation that these terms indicate today.

This is perhaps one of the more reactionary versions of the critique of the “ideology of the aesthetic” that both conservative and critical literary scholars have performed in the wake of the emergence of French post-structuralism.<sup>8</sup> In this account satire is itself properly a mode of literature whose powerful reclamation of intention allows us to access the author and thus to witness the very act of resistance or protest being performed by the satirist, and to escape from and quarantine the fetishistic aesthetic ideology that threatens the function of criticism with irrelevance. Through its dogmatic identification with satire as critique, Carlier’s essay is itself open to the interpretation that it is itself satirical, and that it is satirically taking the general adherence to biographical humanism to its “climax of derangement.” In its rereading of Barthes, Carlier’s essay asserts that it has successfully established that the conflation of subjectivity with language becomes irrelevant to an extra-textual reality that should be seen as the real reward of critical practice, and that such an “outside” to aesthetic solipsism exists in his very essay, in the form of the absolute distinction between the aesthetic (“literal”) reading of Barthes and the satirical. Because both sides cannot communicate with each other, Carlier can assure us that the aesthetic realm and its theoretical allies (the “ex-Nazis”) produce a real phenomenon whose claims about

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<sup>8</sup> See, of course, Terry Eagleton. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

writing are dangerous and anti-democratic.<sup>9</sup> But a reading of Carlier's "resurrection" of the author by means of the notion of "Swiftian" satire (opening this to the broader category "Scriblerian") that I want to depict in this chapter opens the possibility that these claims are themselves satiric overinflations that ridicule the dogmatic aspect of the pragmatic reaction directed at any perceptibly impractical or non-realist form of writing. What emerges from considering the possibility that Carlier himself is not "serious" is a notion of satire that moves us back away from the objective relevance and reference that animates his critique at its "climax of derangement." A satirical reading of the essay also allows us to consider, for instance, the way those who defend the reality of the author do so through textual evidence whose references point only back to other texts.

From this recursively textual reading, is Carlier's ultimate point (that is, the resting place that his argument allows us) then that satire is only "aesthetic" —only concerned with texts and textuality, despite its fervent claims for reference and for a stance of critical opposition? We can read the text satirically because we don't know what the author intended—we are encouraged by certain textual codes of argumentative logic to read it in a "literal" manner, but there are reasons to doubt, many of which pertain to the essence of writing as described by Barthes. After all, encouragement might

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<sup>9</sup> Carlier: "As is well known, although some theoretical writings have had a liberating tendency, antidemocratic and anti-rationalistic rhetoric has been a recurrent feature of many theoretical works published in recent decades" (391).

itself function as part of the satire, and the satirical text invites us to consider this through its militant construction of a duality of opposed positions that prop up reality by performing only further textual reference. From this reading, Carlier's essay about Barthes' rewriting of Swift can be seen to be itself a rewriting of Barthes' rewriting of Swift that ridicules the idea that ridicule is something that escapes or resides prior to textuality. In this ridiculous abyss, Barthes' evaluation of the figure of modernity is lost or blurred. If we apply the practice of reading satirically to Carlier's depiction of Barthes we find ourselves suddenly unsure what to make of the latter's notion of "modernity." The meaning of the term or figure of the modern is sublimated into a term that is irretrievably "textual," for which significance (interpretation) is no longer operative—from the profound to the sublime by way of the proliferation of satire. The modern, when echoing within the satirical chain of reference, changes in its function as vehicle of satirical effect from that which is invested with the particular content of the changes between one epoch and another, to that which, no longer a vessel of content, functions rhetorically to make possible the critical orientation of the satiric text by the indication of epochality in an abstract and formal sense. The modern is precisely the effect of writing as such, as described by Barthes, the production of the very occasion of writing and

reading, the performance of a *raison d'être* for the encounter that occurs at the site of text —“the instance writing” (145).<sup>10</sup>

Reading Carlier's essay as satire (despite the declared intentions of the figure of the author in the text) allows us to see the way in which satire's defense of reference against aesthetic indifference is hardly a certain thing. If choosing to read Barthes literally means damnation to the hell of skepticism or aesthetic autonomy, while satiric faithfulness to the figure of the author preserves a legitimate function for literature, then it is satire itself which proves to be the figure that has always already chosen for us, and which makes the choice into the figure of an *epoch*, a boundary across which passage can be traced. Carlier's approach to Barthes allows us to see that the figure of the real that resists textuality is as much *an effect of textuality* as such as it is external to it. It is the materiality of language—its engagement, as form, with something other than meaning, rhetorical rather than epistemological, that satire gestures towards. And it does so by way of the figure of satirical modernity, which tells us that we have already decided, and that we are always deciding, but that, within writing, decision is never available to us as a truth or falsehood, as a process of knowledge or logic. Nevertheless, we must decide, and it is on the terrain of this necessity that satire encamps.

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<sup>10</sup> I will return repeatedly in what follows to a consideration of the rhetorical production of the instant of writing—the occasion, the propitious moment, or *kairos* (to use Longinus' term) of the text's production.

## **2.2. Swift's Battle and Scriblerian Agon**

Mobilized or encamped, “usefully” critical or “uselessly” aesthetic, Swiftian satire is clearly armed in its confrontation with a modernity, and it is tempting to see the militaristic features of Swift’s intervention into the *Querelle des Ancients et Modernes* as proof that satire is equivalent to critique in its most negating sense. But as I have suggested, the war machine of satire seems to produce unintended results when it is read as condemning aesthetic irrelevance in order to reorient writing towards the figure of an object of critique, and to ground writing in an originary intention. Mobilizing Swift on our own, we might consider his most militaristic text in its satiric engagements, and, importantly, its own performance of the death of the author. A consideration of *A Full and True Account of the Battel Fought Last Friday Between the Antient and Modern Books* (1704) will allow us to reconsider the “Swiftian” attitude toward authorship and modernity, and to propose that these elements of satire are in fact oriented towards something other than conflict, a satiric disorientation that in effect figures the function of the bifurcating poles of critique and poetics within a Real that founds and exceeds these practices. Satire may figure both aesthetic irrelevance and practical critique, but it does so in the unspeakable name of an ineffability that haunts the entire oeuvre of those who practice it, in its “Swiftian” form.

Like “critique” and “aesthetic,” the death of the author is an anachronistic concept when applied to Swift’s moment—what we think of as the author had not properly come into being in this moment before copyright and between patronage and the proliferation of publishing firms.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, authorship was not bound to disciplinary definition, a situation indicated by the wide array of generic forms produced by many writers of the moment (Defoe is perhaps the greatest example, but an exemplary list must include Swift himself). But the relationship between satire and authorship—even in the case of ancient satires by Juvenal and Horace—is clearly one that troubles the notion that a reader can reconstruct the intention of the figure who originates and signs the text, and thus ground interpretation in a personal and extra-textual orientation towards the elements made significant by a narrative or a poem. Satire’s general, transhistorical tendency to undermine reference, and because of this, any stable definition of its own situation within fictionality and critique, has been identified by many critics to many different ends.<sup>12</sup> And the dislocation of the figure of the author is one of the features of that mode of writing we call “literary,” especially in

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<sup>11</sup> The standard genealogical account of this is of course Foucault’s. See Michel Foucault. *The Foucault Reader*. ed. Paul Rabinow 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101-120.

<sup>12</sup> W.B. Carnochan notes that “[e]veryone agrees that satire resists definition,” and Charles A. Knight’s recent account of satiric indirection and indefinability is perhaps the most transhistorical of the bunch. See W. B. Carnochan. “Swift’s Tale: On Satire, Negation, and the Uses of Irony.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 5.1 (1971) and Charles A. Knight. *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

its conjunction with the later institutionalization and disciplining of the literary field. But with regard to the mode of satire specific to the moment I am examining, there is a textual concern with knowledge as it emerges from writing, a concern that concentrates the difficulty represented by an unrevealed authorial identity by making of the text a mirror in whose surface “[b]eholders do generally discover every body’s face but their Own.”<sup>13</sup>

The failure of recognition in the mirror of satire can be credited to satiric textuality: what the text mirrors is itself another mirror, mirrored in the act of mirroring, and what lies “outside” is an effect of exteriority that emerges from this emplacement. What has been identified in various ways as Scriblerian satire is a mode, I will argue, in which reference is reduplicated and intensified so that the applicability of satiric “ridicule” to external figures is lost in the abyss of the mirror doubled. Allen G. Wood casts the difficulty in terms of just such a doubling of satire’s attribution of its actions to objects, which produces what he considers an inextricable mixture of elements peculiar to the satire of the period, another anachronism to explain this death of the author prior to the event of his/her birth. Of Boileau’s satire, he proposes “[g]iven the paradigm of a basic satiric utterance, such as ‘I satirize Chapelain,’ the referent for this ‘I’ may appear

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Swift. *The Writings of Jonathan Swift: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism*. eds. R. A. Greenberg and W. B. Piper. (New York: Norton, 1973), 375.

to be 'I, Boileau,' but it is actually the poetic fiction, the self referential 'I, persona.'" <sup>14</sup> "I" will return later to Boileau, to whom Swift's satire is connected in important ways, as well as this question of the proper *grammar* of satire. Here, however, Wood is identifying the distinguishing feature of what he calls "literary satire," which is to say, satire whose scheme of reference to a world is enabled by the very fractures and dislocations that undermine the stability of the various figurations of the external situation. The persona is the figure who is all reflective surface, the subject of the world in which (for those who share the paranoia of Carlier) mirrors block the exits and uncouth hordes of sociopathic writers have run amok. "Literary satire" animates the self-reflexive fiction in which self is all reflection, providing in the outward orientation to the world the effect of a motivation towards satiric ridicule, the persona or narrator's deep concern with mimetic truth. The intensive mirroring involved proves motivation or intention to exist only as a mirrored reflection of a reflection, something that carries the trace of reference and the "real" with it like a talisman, only to live out the confrontation with this "real" within a set of encounters and conflicts that are both intensified and severed from reality by the repetitions that animate the space of satire.

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<sup>14</sup>Allen G. Wood. *Literary Satire and Theory: A Study of Horace, Boileau, and Pope*. (New York: Garland, 1985), 22. The concept of "persona" gathered much critical attention to the problem of satiric authorship in the 1950s and 60s. The classic documents in this regard are Maynard Mack's "The Muse of Satire" *Yale Review* XLI (1951), 80-92, and Robert C. Elliott's *The Literary Persona* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

In the opening moments of his brief text on books that fight, Swift is proleptically performing Barthes' modern authorial obituary by suggesting that the death of the author is motivated by commodification (a feature which *prima facie* seems to prevent any extrication of the literary from the other textual field of money and exchange, and thus, preventing the emergence of an originating figure whose intentions are knowable and rational), and so, by claiming that a modern moment or crux has emerged within the realm of writing, making satire possible by figuring as analytically explicit but, in an existential or practical sense, thoroughly *implicit* the connection between writers and the marketing and economic afterlife of their work. The figure of modernity or epochality is not new in Swift's time as an element of critique or nostalgia, but I will argue that in this moment the modern is being used to assert or perform the ambivalence of both critique *and* nostalgia by means of the satiric emphasis on relationships that are implicit, entangled, inseparable, even as they are becoming posited as extricable, the products of "explicitation." By the term "implicit," I am referring to both the contemporary (seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century) definition of the term as well as the notion of "explicitation" offered by Michael McKeon in *The Secret History of Domesticity*. The binary implicit/explicit that I use with regard to Swift's text is not precisely the same as McKeon's dialectical notion of explicitation in that McKeon's term describes what appears to the historian as the emergence of practices that, through self-commentary, reinforce and institutionalize themselves (Habermas' "Bourgeois public sphere" is the

exemplar) by becoming formative of and formed by discourse. The key difference here is that in what I will identify here as Scriblerian satire, what is being mobilized as neither figure nor knowledge but as that which cannot be made explicit is not subject to the necessity of a historical transformation of latent to surface or implicit to explicit, and nor is my goal here to depict it within such a narrative of revelation. The terms of the binary I will attempt to divulge from satire, while similar to each other in etymology, are mobilized as if they were truly *opposite*, which is to say, absolute antitheses, unrelated to each other both practically and conceptually. In the mode in which I am describing the concepts “implicit” and “explicit” as they pertain to satiric writing, I propose that neither is able to articulate by means of a relation of negation to some configuration of the other term. The result is that what is “implicit” as figured by Scriblerian satire is only mobilized as a positive performance of aesthetic or existential practice, not as “critique” of the explicitations brought to view by the bright light of modernity.<sup>15</sup> To bolster this method by which I wish to correct the dogmatically dialectical account offered by McKeon, the notion of implicit in the period in question refers to a movement by which identifiably distinct phenomena resist articulation within that distinction. Implicit in the

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<sup>15</sup> See Michael McKeon. “Parsing Habermas’s ‘Bourgeois Public Sphere.’” *Criticism*. 46 no. 2 (2004) 273-77. See also Michael McKeon. *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), xxv-xxvi.

word “implicit,” according to the *OED*, was a move in *contretemps* to any modern emergence of explicit disciplinary distinctions. The *OED* notes that the term in the seventeenth century meant “entangled, entwined, folded or twisted together” (*OED*) and it I argue in what follows that this entangling, enfolding, and twisting are precisely the most “aesthetic” of the maneuvers of satire, providing it with a mode of positive expression that eludes the explicating results of critique. In Scriblerian satire, social elements become engaged in a way that produces an inextricable and indissoluble mixture. This entwinement is the occasion for a third element or determination whose relation to the others, as we will see, is not a negation but a gesture towards something unentangleable, something that escapes this duality and its apparatus of entanglement or capture.

The author is, for Swift’s *Battel*, a battleground on which the question of which mode of understanding—implicit or “explicitated”—will remain legitimate. But this concern with the way we conceive of the figure of the author is also a request for us to concern ourselves primarily with what we have come to think of as textuality, which is to say, the intersection between print and its field of effects in the world, the way that text is embedded in extratextual practice. Swift’s *Battel* makes clear to the text’s readers that the war of the ancients and moderns is concerned with the implications of these positions in their textual terms, which is also to say that Swift identifies this quarrel as taking place in a space separated from (but also, importantly, inextricable from) “real”

warfare and opposition—by analogy a space compared to versions of material battle as such, but despite entanglement in the figure of real war and violence, a separate space in which conflict takes place as an encounter between texts within a library within a text. This textually doubled space is both the apparently physical space of the King's library, the most overtly textual of material institutions that serves as a template to contain, organize and limit printed and authorized works, and print's own containment of meaning, form, and feeling "within" its situation in those works. The injunction, ostensibly provided by the Bookseller (who, according to the 1710 edition is "John Nutt"), "warn[s] the Reader, to beware of applying to Persons what is here meant, only of Books in the most literal Sense. So, when Virgil is mentioned, we are not to understand the Person of a famous Poet, call'd by that Name, but only certain Sheets of Paper, bound up in Leather, containing in Print, the Works of said Poet, and so of the rest" (BB 374).<sup>16</sup> The bookseller obviously has a lot to lose if legal authorities were to see Swift's work as an egregious act of slander (although on the surface this threat is attenuated by dashes of anonymity within the names of the living "moderns" who might be seen as ridiculed by the *Battel*). So, perhaps this distance between persons and "Books in the most literal sense" is just a matter of self-interest on the part of the figure

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<sup>16</sup> Of the curious case of another Scriblerian, Alexander Pope, the practices of censorship, and the name of his publisher, "Anne Dodd," see Jody Greene. *The Trouble with Ownership : Literary Property and Authorial Liability in England, 1660-1730* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 150-194.

of the bookseller Nutt, or Swift. But the reader is drawn into a consideration, nevertheless, of the way in which this conflict does take place within books (and other print), and suddenly reading becomes an act by which we at least attend to the distinction between the competitions of authorship and a person involved in a fight. For the sake of poor Nutt, or because there is no direct route out of the textual containers presented to us, we are to at least hold a need for biography in abeyance, and consider the actions of the figures in the *Battel* to be features of textuality rather than authorial intention.

As a corollary to this at least hypothetical disconnection between author and textuality, the works of important writers ancient and modern that undertake a war among themselves are not motivated here by a figurative playing out of a necessary and structural Bloomian anxiety of influence in which all authors are forced to confront legacy through an Oedipal struggle with their precursors. While the *Battel* supports Bloom's dialectic of literary production in a general way, it does so while gesturing toward a revision of the figure of necessity within this version of influence.<sup>17</sup> Swift notes at the text's beginning that this state of war is not the result of writing or tradition but of a perception of scarcity, and it matters not "whether Real, or in Opinion" (BB 376). War

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<sup>17</sup> See Harold Bloom. *The Anxiety of Influence : A Theory of Poetry*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

is depicted as always possible in a political system in which wealth is distributed haphazardly, but it is not the only possibility within political discourse, provided that some other (figurative or real) relation can be put in its place. Likewise, the ancients and moderns are engaged in a colonial rather than familial relationship—the ancients are stunned by the advances of “a Colony, whom they had admitted out of their own Free Grace, to so near a Neighbourhood. ...[A]s to their own seat, they were *Aborigines* of it” (BB 377). Struggle here is more of a return of the repressed—the ancients, who had, as colonizers, brought the moderns into civilized discourse, are surprised by the uncanny claims to power made by those very subjects whose subjectivity was a product of their very submission to the ancients. The labor of the moderns has brought them a vision of independence, however, and the perception that a relation of deference to antiquity is a form of servitude antithetical to subjective sovereignty has provoked the revolution.

Further troubling the figure of influence and confrontation, perhaps the most prominent feature of the narrative is the digression in which “a material Accident fell out” (BB 381). Rather than falling with the accident (the confrontation between a “wand’ring bee” and a sedentary spider) into a world of material war, we move away from the clash of books to focus our attention on a fabular encounter between animals in the “highest corner” of a window. The spider is wrapped up in defense—the “*Modern way of Fortification*” is depicted as that in which the individual sits at the middle of a series of layers of protection from the exterior world. The bee, not comprehending the

personal stakes behind this system of defenses, flies aimlessly through the maze of structures until he has ripped holes in them (they are, after all, only spider's silk). The spider, greatly angered by the damage to his personal apparatus, swears in trite and coarse ways at the fly, whose freedom of movement and purpose seem to work as an insult to his antagonist. The spider is clearly the more troubled of the two in this confrontation, and the text offers the repeated indication in the text that it is above all *self* that concerns the spider, whether it is a claim that the self is engaged in tradition or an anger that displays an absolute self-importance. The self-inflation of the spider ("till he was ready to burst") and the rhetoric of prideful identity that it cites allows him to produce a version of the English republican praise of landed property over less stable and structured forms of capital. In what seems to be a repetition of a critique of financialization or deterritorialization as "dangerous supplement," the bee's "Livelihood is a universal Plunder upon Nature" and through this financial piracy he fails in his ethical obligations to the law of property by gleaning like "a Freebooter over Fields and Gardens." The bee depicts the spider's self-concern as based on nothing but itself, a recursive "feeding and engendering on it self" that "turns all into Excrement and Venom" (383). The Scriblerians' connection of gender with these repulsive effluvia will return repeatedly in my look at their writing (and gender, here, is epidemic in its uncontrolled transformative tendency), and will be the topic of later discussion. But here, the bee, whose micturitions are characterized as much sweeter and the product of

extensive mobility in both labor and psychological disposition, is finally not patient enough to wait out another recurrence of self-inflation, and he leaves “the *Spider* like an Orator, collected in himself and just prepared to burst out” (BB 383).

Down below, Aesop describes much of all of this on his own—he provides the commentary that stands in for any other reactions that might have been offered by the other books. As witness whose impulse is to reinscribe the exchange of declamation between the two animals into an interpretation that gestures toward practicality, Aesop is imitating his “own” textual model embodied in the widely read and published *Fables*, the bulk of which provide narrative accounts and moral synopses of the meeting of just such anthropomorphized animal pairs as the spider and the bee. The oratorical encounter of the pair up in the window is ready-made for Aesop to provide the summary moral that favors the ancients as the figure of the bee. In this role, he is also serving as literary critic, working the elements of the event into an interpretive structure that translates the depictions of models of identity into forms of writing. The spider, representing the moderns, is only fit to produce “*Wrangling and Satyr*” while the bee represents the simple but pure elements of the ancients’ production, “*our Flights and our Language*.” The latter pair is refigured into an experience of consumption rather than production, aligning the ancients with the humanized features of honey, “sweetness and light” (BB 384-5). But criticism, which in this case is an interpretive and hierarchizing act, is also the quintessential behavior of the moderns: Momus is their patron and his

entreaty to the goddess Criticism (who prefigures Pope's Dulness) produces a grotesque intervention with her son Wotton that is apparently designed to protect him. Indeed, criticism is the act that creates the self-importance of modern texts—the goddess observes that "*Coffee-house Wits instinct by Me, can correct an Author's Style, and display his minutest Errors, without understanding a Syllable of his Matter, or his Language*" (387). The difference between Aesop and the critics is that the degree of self-investment in the interpretive act is far greater in the latter—unwilling to bend toward the text in any gesture of submission, the moderns are those who seek to negate the authority of tradition in order to promote their own advantage in the economy of writing through acts of criticism.

With this, we are back at the fact that two sides are at war here in Swift's short text. The war is one that is made possible by—indeed, its entire justification is a theory of—critical method. This "just war" theory provided by the moderns is one that provides a rationale for a dialectical relationship between texts that fetishizes the production of difference and distance in the form of the necessary conflict between the ancient and the modern.<sup>18</sup> Scarcity—the scarcity of the space available for the texts of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ironically, we might note that Just War theory can be traced back to the ancients, particularly Cicero and Augustine, so that the rationale for justice through agon here is itself borrowed, its traces effaced by the moderns who wish to justify their claims. See John Langan. "The Elements of St. Augustine's Just War Theory." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 12.1 (1984): 19-38, and Alex Bellamy. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 18-29.

moderns to hold prominence in the realm of writing (figured here as the two-tiered top of Mount Parnassus)—demands that tradition be understood as a canonizing process whose agonistic features make modern writing into an act that has internalized the necessity of war as its self-justification. As a contrast to this, the ancients propose an understanding of tradition that would result in an absolutist, colonial hierarchy, with the lesser position (the moderns) unable to deny the authority of the master ancients, whose priority is seen as performed in every moment of the moderns' written production. This rigidly hierarchical version of tradition is then translated ideologically by Aesop and those who speak for the ancients into the figure of "sweetness and light." The incommensurability of these two positions means that, in spite of Swift's indication that war is a state of exception within literary production, the figure of scarcity is always being generated within the colonial hierarchy promoted by the ancients and those who side with them. This scarcity devolves constantly into war, which serves as a general orientation in Swift's text toward the history of repetitions of the *Querelle*. Both sides are complicit in an addiction to warfare that comes to dominate the scene of writing, so that, under the *aegis* of this scarcity, writing has become for both sides motivated solely by the production of a position within a struggle that only serves to eternally reinscribe that struggle as that which is always being engaged in the very moment of writing.

That we have no way of determining the winner of the *Battel* is likewise as much a structural feature of this yoking of writing and war as it is a result of the self-conscious

exploration of the difference between print and manuscript technologies embodied in the gaps and hiatuses in the text. The winner's trophy is authority within writing (a place atop Parnassus, with a scenic view), and no matter what the outcome, both sides will be engaged in the anxiety produced by authority as comparative figure. There are many deaths depicted within this war, and it is not at all clear from its role in the text how death allows us to think through the encounters between the two sides, whether figuratively (in the sense of the larger *Querelle*) or literally (within the text). The death of these books is a stark element—while the reader will certainly not be concerned that real lives are being lost, the violence that colors the scene of Pindar's slaying of Oldham is shocking—a reference to the bloody images of war in *The Illiad*, to be sure, but these serve here also as a reinforcement of the violence of the conjunction of writing and aggression that has provided the occasion for the war. The power of the images of violence, citations of Homer's depictions of war, emerges from this citation to function as a jarring contrast to the more light-hearted tone of much of Swift's text. Death is a gesture to another space—that of an end or culmination (despite its citation of a prior moment in Homer) that the text itself is unable to provide, or perhaps that of a metaphysical outside—but this other space serves *as* exterior to the struggle taking place in the narrative. The end of the document, just before it leaves off with another performance of the manuscript's insufficiency and its translation into the medium of print, bids goodbye to the "beloved, loving pair" of friends, Bentley and Wotton, after

they are horribly skewered by Boyle. The prospect of textual immortality is paraded here with some irony: Bentley and Wotton, it is claimed (this will be repeated by Pope in the *Dunciad*) have access to an afterlife (“immortal shall you be”) through the “Wit and Eloquence” of the narrator. The outside of the *Battel* is that afterlife of writing in which more writing is produced, in which writing itself can function as the impetus for more writing, but this increase of “life” happens outside of the narrative account here. As blazing with sarcasm as the final moments of the account seem, the *Battel* nevertheless indicates that there may be, in futurity, another way for texts to bind themselves to each other so that both fame and friendship can be achieved without the production of death.

This other space, or more precisely the possibility of an other spatio-temporal mode of the relation the act of writing might hold to the written text—here, gestured to as an outside of the text (and, by extension, difference from warlike writerly agon)—is that which Swift’s satire, and later, Scriblerian satire, are engaged in producing. This production is not presented as a coherently codified project, or as a partisan position against another way of writing (or of politics or culture). The other space represented here hypothetically as the afterlife of the moderns is performed as what we might call *the implicit* within the text of the satire. This is not a performance of a mode of figuration or a scheme of reference. The text of the satire produces a set of gestures that indicate that, as component to the text’s depiction of two warring parties, an element remains which effectively and decisively prevents a reading of the text that can situate itself as an

*interpretation* of the text's "position" with regard to the events and figures it portrays.

This element of the implicit is caught up in every aspect of the text, so that we might say that the features of satire that are commonly identified as fundamental to the genre (indirection, critique, conservatism) are performed at the same time that it performs gestures in a direction different from these tendencies. The implicit is inextricably tied up with the representation of critique in a text like *The Battel of the Books*—the fact of an implicit concern, or an implicit position, is constantly the concern of the text, even as it generates one explicit reference after another. The frustrating element of satire for many critics is that this feature prevents the "goal" of Swift's satiric writings from becoming evident, or produces an endless series of claims by critics to know or understand the orientation of satire's critique, because Swift's texts themselves preserve this repetition of implicit gesture to the very end. In the *Battel*, the unwillingness to make explicit what it is that energizes the text is what we are left with at the conclusion, when an account of the battle's outcome is exhibited as the asterisked representation of fragmentary manuscript transmission and we are left with the phrase "*Desunt caetera.*"<sup>19</sup> The terms of

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<sup>19</sup> As reference to a typical editorial comment within a scholarly edition or other printed citation of interrupted or incomplete manuscripts, this comment is a gesture back to textuality itself, which is to say, an attention to the text as artifact whose historicity has a significant effect on what can be communicated to the reader. It also foregrounds the fact that print here is itself a reference to a "prior" technological form, and this act of repetition (of adherence to the prior technology and its claims to encapsulate the scene of writing). As a reference to John Donne's 1633 poem "Resurrection, Imperfect," whose text is followed by the same phrase, the *Battel* is a citation of unfinished resurrection (perhaps here to be applied to Wotton and Bentley—a mock heroic application, to be sure) that postpones closure of the narrative field and promises a return, whether this is of the fame of the critics mentioned, or of the reconciliation of the two sides in some

this phrase only reinforce the gesture toward the implicit, so that if “the rest is lacking” we feel that there *is* (yet cannot be sure of) a final valence of the uncertain terms “rest” and “lacking,” words whose application fail to bring into explicit light the nature of the final commentary at the end of this satiric work.

The confrontation between the spider and the bee similarly holds the gesture towards an implicit purpose or orientation, even as it refuses to allow any explicit account to exhaust its role in the text. Aesop’s reading of this event as a rendition of the two sides in the war that demands his commentary as critic and writer of fables cannot be trustworthy for us—even though the account clearly considers the foibles of the ancients to be less serious than those of the moderns, Aesop’s interpretations are too self-centered to avoid the pitfalls of the spider’s solipsistic worldview. This reading of the fabular encounter fails to serve as the “truth” of the matter for the text, just as the perspectives offered by Momus or Criticism themselves fail to be truthful about the power of criticism. The text refuses to affirm these representative accounts by allowing them to either have clear and necessary effects on the outcome, or by sanctioning them

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future of the text. See Ruth E. Falk. "Donne's Resurrection, Imperfect." *Explicator* 17 (1958), Item 24. While in Donne’s poem the resurrection is not depicted as occurring on the terrain of textuality, in Swift’s piece the incompleteness is entirely of the text, and if it is pointed to the resurrection of the two critics, indicates a future reconciliation of the body and soul of texts.

through the power of the narrator. The narrator's own claim to provide a "full impartial Account" of the fighting will not allow any intervention on behalf of either side's way of seeing the world without undermining the very rationale for documenting the occurrence in the first place. The "implicit" orientation of the narrator is thus presented as being either irrelevant or inscrutable—a repetition of the "death of the author" performed by the dissociation of authors from texts insisted on by John Nutt in the Preface. To extricate a coherent "message," "meaning" or authorial intention from this compounded set of unrevealed and unrevealable implicits gestured toward by the text would be presumptuous. And while these problems of knowledge are presented by many kinds of texts, it is Scriblerian satire that self-consciously proliferates them in the favor of gestures toward the implicit.

If this is to be a historical narrative, then I must apologize for having produced Martinus Scriblerus anachronistically in conjunction with a text that predates him. Swift's early satires precede his friendship with Pope by at least eight years.<sup>20</sup> Their later collaboration (beginning 1715) as the pseudonymous and Quixotic Martinus Scriblerus will come into being as an embodiment of satiric textuality in the figure of an author—Martinus Scriblerus is born as a living embodiment of the death of the author. I have

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander Pope, John Arbuthnot and Charles Kerby-Miller. *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*. (New Haven,; Published for Wellesley College by Yale University Press, 1950), 20.

called Swift's satire Scriblerian because the features of the concern with language and with writing of the later group of Scriblerian satirists (including Swift) are consistent with those in Swift's early work (even if these concerns do not exhaust this work). I find promising Charles Kirby-Miller's suggestion that many of the works that were put out under the individual names of the men involved with Scriblerus (Swift, Pope, Gay, Parnell, and Harley) should be understood as intimately related with that group, and indeed, find their origin there. This feature that I have identified so far as the "implicit" will actually have to be given another name to more fully describe its function for Scriblerian writing. Its other name for this period as that which indicates the implicit is the sublime, a category that preexisted Swift's writing and that was a significant influence on the entire field of imaginative and rhetorical writing in the late seventeenth and the entirety of the eighteenth century. This element, as that which is present as an implicit concern throughout the Scriblerians' work, enables the production of a mode of writing (Scriblerian satire) that, from the perspective of our canon, dominated the literary scene in England during the 1710s-1740s. While even the name "sublime" will fail to maintain itself in relation to the implicit feature of Scriblerian textuality, it is nevertheless a particular version of this concept—that of the Longinian sublime as introduced to England by the writings of Boileau—that serves to enable Scriblerus to write. Ultimately, the word "sublime" becomes distanced, "explicitated," in the course

of the development of “aesthetics” during the century.<sup>21</sup> In the period from roughly 1674 to 1745, however, the Boilevian-Longinian sublime as promoted by the Scriblerians funds the presence in their writing of a gesture to the implicit that enables the birth and life of Scriblerus, which is to say the *raison d’etre* of the mode of poetics contained in Scriblerian satire.

### **2.3. The Sublime and Imitative Aesthetics after Boileau**

Peter de Bolla and James Noggle offer discerning analyses of the role of the sublime within the aesthetic developments of the British eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Both writers depict the emergence of the sublime as a thoroughly modern phenomenon—de Bolla with the emergence of the “autonomous subject” within the widening scope and cultural authority of the “discourse of the sublime,” and Noggle with his look at the further elaboration in the modern moment of Cartesian (or Pyrrhonian) skepticism in the form of a conflicted Augustan aesthetics. Importantly, however, despite Noggle’s close and discerning attention to Augustan writing (especially Pope) and de Bolla’s

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<sup>21</sup> For an excellent brief account of this process of explicitation and discursive travel of the “discourse of the sublime,” see the “Introduction” to Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds. *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-16.

<sup>22</sup> See Peter De Bolla. *The Discourse of the Sublime : Readings in History, Aesthetics, and the Subject*. (New York, : Basil Blackwell, 1989), ch 1-3, and James Noggle. *The Skeptical Sublime : Aesthetic Ideology in Pope and the Tory Satirists*. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), introduction and ch 1-2.

artful depiction of the autonomous subject emerging as an artifact of the aesthetic encounter with sublime excess, both writers offer a relative dismissal of the Longinian sublime as a well-meaning but only half-formed precursor to the later fulfillment of the aesthetic ideology in the philosophy of Burke and Kant.<sup>23</sup> Noggle's work offers as its historical analysis the claim that, for Augustan writers, the sublime is an accessory to a (borrowed) skepticism that, taken to its logical ends, fails to fully pursue its project of metaphysical critique and ultimately falls back (within the gesture of the denial of this very failure) on an authoritative notion of truth or reality. The sublime in this formulation is primarily the same notion of sublimity held by the Whigs—Shaftesbury, Addison, and ultimately, Burke.

There are crucial differences, however, between the "Whig sublime" and the "Tory sublime," differences that Noggle's account dismisses as covered within the category of skepticism. While I will agree that skepticism is a vital and philosophically motivating feature of the Augustans' appropriation of the Longinian sublime, I will argue that it is a *fidelity* to the latter concept which operates as a new development both within the realm of skeptical thought and within that field of behavior that we now call

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<sup>23</sup> Because of the genuine critical acumen of these two works, however, I cannot reduce their claims to the simple construction of a *telos* for the sublime in the eighteenth century. The sublime as it is depicted in Longinus is not, however, given the attention it deserves that would allow its real and important differences to emerge. This is to some extent briefly corrected in the "Introduction" to Ashfield and de Bolla's reader, a fact that seems almost consciously motivated by the relative neglect of Longinus in de Bolla's earlier monograph on the sublime.

aesthetics. The Augustans' aesthetic adherence to that element and practice made available through Longinus transforms the negative features of skeptical doubt not, *pace* Noggle, into the abyss of nihilism (contradicted at the brink by the poets' lingering will for order), but into the source of a simulacral aesthetic philosophy that can effectively *turn its back* on the necessity of a foundation in truth (a pattern that I will explain further, below) in the gesture to, if not the name of, the implicit presence of the sublime. This process introduces an enactment of subjectivity that establishes itself on a claim that subjectivity as such does not depend on the interpellation of authority or law, or on the underwriting power of metaphysical reference. The aesthetic feature that emerges from the Augustan satirists' reading of Boileau's Longinus as the radical critique *par excellence* of the prevailing metaphysics of writing is that of the *indifference* of Augustan satire, a mode of "aesthetic" orientation that offers as its primary feature a proliferating scheme of "reference," but which eliminates the mimetic or practical application of that reference toward reforming effects that would exceed the text in order to preserve a more intense orientation to a sublime ineffability within the scene of satiric textuality itself. That embodiment of poetics invoked into life in the figure of Scriblerus and made text in Scriblerian poetics is driven by a devotion to a set of poetic gestures that disenfranchise the explicit and adhere to the presence of the implicit sublimity of the act of writing. This devotion, repeated over and over again in the texts of the Scriblerians as

textual gesture, is the feature of their satire *par excellence*, producing a repetition of faith wedded not to truth but to the implicit sublimity of satire.

The intensification of the acts of translation and repetition in England after the works of Longinus and Boileau points to the treatise *Peri Hupsous* as a significant event in the scene of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writing, an event that enables those who attune themselves to it to figure an emerging modernity as that which takes a step too far, a *faux pas* followed by a fall away from an already fallen language. In one sense, this might be understood as a feature of that well-narrated phenomenon we've come to know as "neoclassicism," but it is as much a reaction to or an entirely different mode of neoclassicism from that which had *already* come to dominate English culture. The commitment to the enactment of the mode of writing depicted by Longinus and his devotees allows the opening of a space in which indifference can be made legible, a space from which a gesture toward *différance* might be performed. Scriblerian satire performs this gesture, recites this commitment, and offers a critique of aesthetic production that performs what it asserts is the only possible poetics, reenacting translation and imitation again and again as the opening to subjectivity as such—the subjectivity that emerges through an experience of and a devotion to sublimity in writing. This theatrics of commitment within the coterie of the Scriblerian satirists establishes both the figure of an impending or arriving modernity (emerging as the return of an uncanny and monstrous repressed possibility from within the heart of the

practice of poetics) and offers as modernity's excluded "other" the practices of a poetics of imitation and translation in the form of satire, a (re)enactment of a thoroughly anti-modern position—not opposed to the modern, but different from, yet entangled with it. The repetition of Scriblerian satiric practice performs this entanglement—the *implicit*—again and again, all the while repeating the citation of a gesture to that which can become neither implicit nor explicit, a gesture towards a line of flight figured in part by the Longinian notion of the sublime. The sublime becomes possible through the very poetic repetition and citation that asserts the existence of the unentangled as a fleeting and extralinguistic element—modernity—fundamentally different from the features I have been calling implicit and explicit.

De Bolla's description of the development of notions of the sublime indicates that an increasing systematicity pervades its function within the politics of the self, a narrative that situates the sublime within the greater emergence of notions of the autonomy of the aesthetic realm in the eighteenth century. In de Bolla's account, the sublime becomes more able to both produce and control itself by means of its enabling of a subject who has become intimately tied to the practice of aesthetic consumption—a process of subjectification via addiction. I will argue, in effect adding a chapter to the beginning stages of de Bolla's account, that the concern with the Longinian sublime as performed by the Scriblerians and, to a lesser extent, their predecessors (especially Dryden and Rochester), is indeed similarly concerned with the production of

subjectivity as are the later Kantian and Burkean sublimes. This subjectivity is, however, neither individual nor consuming, but is instead depicted as emerging immanently from the affective force and energy of language, which is posited by the Scriblerians as an *a priori* system of disciplinary control *avant la lettre*, a material basis for social cohesion that is made obsolete by an emerging virtuality. This virtuality and its acolyte social features (in the field of economy, paper money and credit; in the field of poetics, an increase in attention to the “new” and to the modern as such, freed from its moorings in “antiquity”) coalesce for the Scriblerians into a set of practices that in effect threaten the field of the social with (what will ultimately be *The Dunciad*'s) entropic denouement, destroying the affective features of Longinian poetics that serve as a last line of defense against a rampant modernity and, perversely, create both the possibility of that defense, and the very figure of modernity towards which this defense must suggest not its opposition but its (in)difference.<sup>24</sup> What is produced, both in the figure of modernity and in the figure of Scriblerian aesthetics, is the very possibility of thinking otherwise, of proposing a mode of poetics that has always already been lost, yet which remains in this moment of an experience of its loss as the last trace of sublimity in the face of the Dulness of modernity. The affective power of writing is dead: long live the affective power of writing!

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<sup>24</sup> I will discuss this virtuality in Chapter 2, elaborating the ways in which Scriblerian writing attempts to articulate a negative, modern virtuality, and to embody or perform an alternative, metamorphic virtuality.

I should make it clear that what is at stake in this discussion is not the nostalgic reclamation of a long-lost notion of the aesthetic subject that might revolutionize modern critical theory in that anachronistic way described by Gilles Deleuze as “taking an author from behind.”<sup>25</sup> While this practice is often striking in its results, there is first a genealogy to be traced that will establish a set of clearer connections between the Scriblerian appropriation of Longinus and its relationship to one of the most important aesthetic practices of the eighteenth century: the institution and discipline of literature itself. Christian Thorne, to whose depiction of the Scriblerian critique of the public sphere I am indebted, asks, “what ultimately is a publishing that is not public if not the literary? When, in other words, is a public artifact not public? When it is aesthetic.”<sup>26</sup> The Scriblerians and their sublime proto-aesthetic practice are, for Thorne, oriented

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<sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6. And in denying this, I am, of course, endorsing it as well—but with an interpretive difference, which is to say a concern that the way this “perverse” Deleuzian mode of reading is typically understood is as critique of staid and formulaic models of approaches to the text. Instead, we can more usefully think of this textual sodomy as productive of an other kind of offspring—the monstrous as return of the repressed. But this return as the return of a mode of thinking *otherwise*, whose relation to normative reading practices is not wholly one of negation, but of an indifference that is vital to the very possibility of thought. This is not quite the Kantian indifference required by the act of aesthetic judgment—as I will indicate, Kant’s notion of the subject does away with important elements of the aesthetic subjectivity made possible by Scriblerus and Longinus (in particular, the engagement of the writing and speaking individual in the very process of the genesis of subjectivity, something that, for Kant, has been transferred to the responsibility of the *a priori*). For Deleuze, thought must not become trapped by negation in a dialectic of critique, but must produce practices that exist in indifference to the metaphysical elements of dialectical thought.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Thorne. “Thumbing Our Nose at the Public Sphere: Satire, the Market, and the Invention of Literature.” *PMLA* 116.3 (2001), 540.

towards the difficult act of critique of that which they identify as “public,” and as “modern,” even as they find themselves inexorably caught in the very practices they ridicule. But while Thorne sees “immanent critique” where many critics have seen “paradox” (538-9), I would further dissent from this tendency by arguing that Scriblerian satire is, rather than only engaged in what we think of as *critique*, in fact an aesthetic of *transformation* or *reevaluation* in which that which has become or is becoming “modern” (the public sphere, writing, love, gender, nation) is dis- and refigured within the practice of poetics by the figure of metamorphosis.<sup>27</sup> Scriblerian satire attempts to remain faithful to the possibility of poetry by first defining the features of modernity and then subjecting these features to a transformation (a transfiguration) in which they are imbued with sublime energy, even as this transformation is typically depicted as not resulting in an accompanying transformation of the social field. Rather than understanding itself as trapped in a “dilemma” of “hypocrisy” (Thorne 538), Scriblerian satire understands its poetic acts as performing the destabilizing (yet enabling) practices of imitation, transformation, and resubjectification, thus creating a sublime intervention that, rather than negating, shrugs its shoulders towards (turns its back on) or perhaps laughs ambivalently at the modern that it figures and refigures. It is this act itself—the act of Scriblerian satire—that depicts itself as producing an autonomous space of

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<sup>27</sup> The topic of Chapter 2.

difference, one from which a subject might emerge whose allegiances are not to the world but to the *text*, which is to say, to the performance of a specific mode of textuality that allows the notions of difference, excess and autonomy to persist, in the despite of those “modern” notions of text that would make this poetic subjectivity impossible.

Pope’s hagiography of Longinus in *An Essay on Criticism* is a fine example of the way in which the Scriblerian poet performs this kind of figurative de- and recathexis. Pope’s depiction of the “Critick” with a “Poet’s Fire” is imbued at first glance with the sublimity of powerful legal authority: “An ardent *Judge*, who Zealous in his Trust,/With Warmth gives Sentence, yet is always *Just*”.<sup>28</sup> What has typically been observed as a truly sublime statement of praise is of course the imitation of Boileau that follows, as the poet exclaims that Longinus “*Is himself that great Sublime he draws*” (l. 680). This imitation is an attribution of sublimity that might in one sense be described as a feature of individual essence or personality (Longinus “*is*” sublime) credited to a historical and authorial subject. But this is not the properly sublime sense of this statement, and for Pope’s poem to also faithfully enact the Longinian sublime, the sentence has to take on a new valence. Longinus *is* the sublime he draws, not in the sense of an adjectival attribution taking the verb *to be* as the agent of metonymic linkage of a supplemental

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<sup>28</sup> “An Essay on Criticism.” In Alexander Pope and John Everett Butt, *Poems*. (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1963), 143.

feature to a position of subjectivity, but in the sense that *Longinus comes into being as aesthetic subject by the act of drawing the sublime*. The “ardent judge” Longinus thus becomes a subject (“is”) by performing the sublime act of criticism, which is not, as it had become for the “moderns” of Pope’s day, an act of judgment evaluating adherence to rules. Here, it is a matter of criticism that operates by way of “Poet’s fire,” whose primary act is to “With Warmth give Sentence” —not, that is, in the sense of a judge who acts enthusiastically or affectionately in the duty of his judgment (nor one who acts with objective distance to this office), but rather, with warmth that *is* the sentence that Longinus confers, warmth that serves as integral, entwined element of that judgment, not as an adjectival or ornamental feature of the act. The laws of such a judge are not and cannot be separated from the production of the sublime, in which there are two aspects of *example* at work strengthening the laws. The most obvious, that Longinus provides his own writing as the strongest example of the sublime in his depiction of the laws (and in his acts of judgment), is perhaps the most accessible interpretation. But a reader invested in the mode of thought offered by Longinus would be tempted to understand “example” as, once again, the very act of law, so that law itself is only truly available for Longinian aesthetics by means of example.<sup>29</sup> The judgment of the true critic

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a definition of *example* that, while now archaic, was used as recently as 1700 to indicate “a precedent appealed to, to justify or authorize any course of action.” The distinction of precedent from origin is crucial here—the act of reference in the former resists something of the metaphysical denotation of the latter.

is produced by an offering of affective warmth (itself embodied in poetic language) by means of the comparison of a poetic work to examples, whose methods of the production of “poetic fire” are, in that comparison, *performed* by the “ardent,” “zealous” arbiter as a bringing into being of a critic’s subjectivity. Only the faithful can come into being as a sublime subject, and only through adherence to the act of imitation and citation of example can zealous and ardent faith be expressed. Other modes of criticism become either rule-bound or dangerously radical by comparison—they literally have no place within this mode of poetics and subjectivity that engages the implicit within the text by performing textual example in order to bring the act of criticism to life.

And just as Longinian critical subjectivity occurs in “An Essay on Criticism” as the staging of sublimity as imitative practice, poetic subjectivity after the seventeenth-century translation of Longinus into French (from the Greek) by Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux became similarly invested in imitation and its variants (translation, paraphrase, association of ideas), and in fact produced a significant shift in the conception of imitation available for writers in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The genre of the Imitation emerges in the Restoration in a newly secularized opening to poetic production, one that has been typically identified by literary historians by means of its most basic figurative feature: reference to a Roman or Greek past rather than a present poetic mode (resulting in the label “neoclassicism”). Howard Weinbrot traces the origin of this genre to the mid-century, and to the roots that might indeed be

called properly neoclassical: "the Imitation sprang from the theory of free translation made popular by Denham and Cowley and reinforced by Horace's famous demand not to translate word for word."<sup>30</sup> According to Weinbrot, Denham and Cowley were proponents of the metaphor of providing English "dress" or "clothes" for ancient models, a notion of translation-as-imitation whose explicit concern with depicting the figural garments of modernity (as such) seems to be shared by later seventeenth century and Augustan writers. Harold F. Brooks notes that "[i]n opposition to the literalism of [Ben] Jonson and his followers, Cowley contended that translators ought 'to supply the lost Excellencies of another *Language* with new ones in their own'. This method, he went on to suggest, might be given the name of *Imitating* if that of *Translating* were refused it."<sup>31</sup> The notion of "Excellencies" points toward a sublime aesthetic of translation, and both Denham and Cowley were interested in ensuring that the qualities of sublime poetics they felt were present in a devotion to classical texts could be communicated to their contemporary moment. The willing lapse of mid-century notions of translation and imitation into a looser, Horatian correspondence is motivated, in other words, by an

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<sup>30</sup> Howard D. Weinbrot. "Translation and Parody: Towards the Genealogy of the Augustan Imitation." *ELH* 33.4 (1966), 446-7.

<sup>31</sup> Harold F. Brooks. "The 'Imitation' in English Poetry, Especially in Formal Satire, before the Age of Pope." *The Review of English Studies* 25.98 (1949), 127.

imitative practice that gives close attention to the production in one language of the “Excellencies” of another.<sup>32</sup>

Walter Benjamin’s essay on “The Task of the Translator” deals provocatively with this question of the function of linguistic “Excellencies,” offering a set of theoretical complications that can provide us with some conceptual perspective on the seventeenth-century mode of translation that I am beginning to depict here. Benjamin writes that “[o]nly if the sense of a linguistic creation may be equated with that of the information it conveys does some ultimate, decisive element remain beyond all communication—quite close and yet infinitely remote, concealed or distinguishable, fragmented or powerful.”<sup>33</sup> If the seventeenth century shift towards an acceptance of “loose” translation that depicts the ornaments (“dress”) or poetic achievement (“Excellencies”) of language as the proper substance of translation, then it would seem through Benjamin’s formulation that perhaps what has actually been taken up in the move away from literality is a concern with accuracy of meaning—with a conveyance of the thought “behind” the language

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<sup>32</sup> “But indeed, from the time of Oldham and Rochester, imitation became one of the fashionable forms of composition. Sedley, Congreve, Rowe, Tickell, Duke, John Hughes, Fenton, Yalden, ‘knowing Walsh’, and many named and unnamed contributors to the Miscellanies, all tried their hands at the imitation of an ode, epode, or epistle of Horace or an epigram of Martial, an elegy of Ovid or Tibullus, or a pastoral of Theocritus or Virgil” (Brooks 138).

<sup>33</sup> Walter Benjamin. “The Task of the Translator” in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996), 260.

rather than the language itself. However, Benjamin's depiction of the supersensible element within "linguistic creation" would seem to indicate that as form is abandoned (i.e. as "loose" translations concern themselves more explicitly with the communication of meaning rather than formal accuracy or imitation), what is hidden by and within language remains even more firmly so—the "pure language" that exists as the "truth" of language itself remains silenced by the particularities of individual statements that point to particular contexts, events, or significances. The concern with ontic existents prevents the uncovering of the effect of the ontological as such—the somewhat Heideggerian "translation" of Benjamin's thought in the way that I've put it here would seem to indicate via analogy that human being finds its truth in language in its "pure" (es)sense, and that this truth of language is experienced as existing only in the act of translation (and, in this existence, only "present" as a figure of absence or loss), which is the linguistic act *par excellence*.<sup>34</sup> Only in the act of a translation does language ultimately resist the either-or shift into form or content (what Paul de Man will call in a discussion

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<sup>34</sup> "All suprahistorical kinship between languages consists in this: in every one of them as a whole, one and the same thing is meant. Yet this one thing is achievable not by any single language but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another: the pure language" (Benjamin 257). This claim for the relationship between totality and truth through experience of translation is a difference between Benjamin and the Scriblerians, a difference in the rendition of translation as an explicit concern with language itself and its relation to Being. For the Scriblerians and to some extent those who precede them, the truth content of translation is not engaged with totality or knowledge, but with less perspectival elements that are inextricable from the elements of the text that figure themselves as truth or knowledge.

of Benjamin the interpretive modes of “poetics” and “hermeneutics”)<sup>35</sup>, and this resistance is, for Benjamin, a productive act—it is the trace of the “pure language” that holds the meaning of language as such (yet which is not at all delimited or contained in the particularities of specific languages), simultaneously hidden within and produced by the experience of translation. In terms of the seventeenth century, the changing concerns of translators and theory about translation do produce a tendency for translators to side themselves with the priority of meaning, a move away from a preoccupation with the literal elements of syntax and grammar and with fidelity of formal accuracy in translating these. But these late seventeenth century translators do not exchange content for form—it is not that “meaning” is the alternative to literality or form. As we will see, it is neither form nor content that emerges as the “task” in the late seventeenth century. More and more, it is translation itself which is targeted as the proper emergent phenomenon of translation, an act that is, when performed in this reflexive manner, allows a corresponding performance of the entanglement of form and content (and, as ineffable accompaniment of this entanglement, the sublime).

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<sup>35</sup> Paul de Man. “‘Conclusions’: Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’” in Paul De Man. *The Resistance to Theory*. Theory and History of Literature ; V. 33 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 88. Dryden, in his writing on translation, stresses features that underline the way Benjamin’s essay produces a disjunction, an abyss, between the two modes, offering something less transcendent than a messianic conception of historical and linguistic change. What emerges in de Man’s reading of Benjamin is an uncanny notion—that of language itself as the fundamental register or model of the “inhuman”—that which can be situated in absolute indifference to (rather than opposition to) the category of human. I will return to this below.

I will provide a few examples that should move us toward a more complete explanation of this reflexive attention to repetition within translation. Tanya Caldwell observes that, as a signal of this epochal moment in English translation practice, “Denham’s translation theory...first formulates the...notion of a ‘transfusion’ of poetical spirit.”<sup>36</sup> In his essay on the translation of the second book of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Denham observes that there are

certain Graces and Happinesses peculiar to every Language, which gives life and energy to the words; and whosoever offers at Verbal Translation, shall have the misfortune of that young Traveller, who lost his own language abroad, and brought home no other instead of it: for the grace of the Latine will be lost by being turned into English words; and the grace of the English, by being turned into the Latine Phrase.<sup>37</sup>

There is certainly in the Denham of the 1630s-1650s something of a precursor of what we will see in Boileau’s Longinus of the 1670s. Here we find, in the briefest of narrative moments, the sublimely chilling possibility of a “young Traveller” who could uncannily lose his own language while in a foreign land and have absolutely no

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<sup>36</sup> Tanya Caldwell. "John Dryden and John Denham." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 46.1 (2004), 51.

<sup>37</sup> Virgil and John Denham. *The Destruction of Troy; an Essay Upon the Second Book of Virgils Aeneis, Written in the Year, 1636.* [8], 28 p. vols. (London: Printed for Humphrey Moseley ..., 1656), iii. Cited in Caldwell (52).

recourse to communication—the horrific exile of absolute linguistic abjection. This is compounded by the fact that our traveler does not “bring home” another language—indicating that experiencing a foreign tongue in a way that resembles “Verbal Translation” (i.e. literality) alone will not allow it to remain in the mind. The situation of virtual aphasia is not produced, in Denham’s theory, by means of a loss of access to words. It is not the meaning or content that is primarily of concern here, especially in the sense of content that Benjamin offers, which is that content is equivalent to information. But nor is it the form, in abstraction from the content—the grammar and structure of linguistic production are equally disqualified by this vignette. In 1656 Cowley calls the result of literal translation “Raving,” and this connection between the comportment of madness and the experience of a literal translation indicates that metaphrase has become an untenable solution.<sup>38</sup> It is the “life and energy” produced by “Grace” that allows access to language in this comparison, so that the literal translation’s failure to attend to these elementary features produces the equivalent of the traveler who cannot *remember* or *learn* a language. Affect and energy are the components of the bond between language and the mind, and these are threatened by both an overly literal and an overly hermeneutic approach to translation, prompting translation following Denham to begin to concern itself primarily with the production of “impression.”

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<sup>38</sup> Cowley is cited by Maurice O’Sullivan Jr.. “Running Division on the Groundwork: Dryden’s Theory of Translation.” *Neophilologus* 64.1 (1980), 147.

While John Dryden did not wholly accept the translation theory enacted by Denham and Cowley, his writerly practice does preserve the mode or genre of “Imitation” suggested by Cowley even as Dryden asserts that translation might be poorly served by a reduction to this idea. As depicted by Maurice O’Sullivan, Jr., Dryden considered his plays to participate in the genre of Imitation as described by Cowley, and his translations to offer something more mimetic, more authentic (and thus more faithful to style and poetic form). The distinction made here between Dryden’s imitations and his translations, however, points to a very important slippage that Dryden introduces within his appropriation of Denham’s and Cowley’s theories. Dryden’s “imitations” are not at all the kind of productions proposed by the earlier poets, but preserve the name of that category in order to make use of its credentials. Easily visible here is a Platonic distinction within Dryden’s assignment to himself of the various tasks of writing. As O’Sullivan, Jr. notes, “[i]t is emulation, not imitation, which Dryden is striving for in his plays. His goal is the representation of nature rather than of Shakespeare” (149).<sup>39</sup> The concept of nature, attempted linguistically in the act of translation, is an ideal that should be worshipped in the expression of a translator’s

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<sup>39</sup> O’Sullivan, Jr. compares this to Pope in the *Essay on Criticism*, who argues “that nature, and especially its rules, can best be studied through great works of literature” (158n.16). There is a difficult conflation in this statement between the notion that nature can be studied and the notion that it can be imitated. And with respect to Dryden, it is worth noting that his understanding of imitation is that it partakes of a Platonic idealism in order to imitate an abstract notion of writing—one that does not exist in any iteration, only in an ideal form (or in the notion of potential that accompanies this kind of Platonism).

concern with accuracy to it. Likewise, Dryden's translations proper are "attempts to introduce readers to inaccessible authors" (149)—a primarily pedagogical or hermeneutic concern. There is, in this formulation, the image of a "natural" narrative of tragic consequence (the ideal *Antony and Cleopatra*, in this case) remaining aloof regally on an ethereal throne, rejecting earthly copies of its perfection by asserting over and over again the very sovereignty of that perfection. Likewise, a communication of the ideal essence of ancient (or other) authors is the motivating feature in the act of translation, a concern with accuracy and truth as these might become accessible to modern readers. O'Sullivan sees Dryden's form of Imitation as a variant of the imitative practice of Denham and Cowley, but he makes this connection by mistaking Dryden's adherence to formal idealism for a rough equivalent to the notion of loose translation introduced by Dryden's poetic predecessors that distances itself from an allegiance to both information (hermeneutics) and style (poetics). In this case, however, it seems as though Dryden has appropriated the distinctly un-Platonic modes of Imitation offered especially by Cowley, and silently converted them (through a series of denials of this very act of conversion) into a set of practices that, first, undermine the very difference that these practices propose as a fundamental feature of the translational act of reference (i.e. into a kind of Platonic idealism), and second, exchange their concern with energy, affect and mood for a concern with accuracy, information, and exposure to the historical importance that persists residually in the works of ancient authors.

Given the emergence of English practices of loose translation (or its companion Imitation), Boileau's translation of Longinus might not be said to offer a completely revolutionary notion of imitation-as-translation when it appeared in 1674. But those features that later writers would attribute as originating in Denham and Cowley were given high visibility by the new Longinus, and strengthened by a sublime amplification of the theories of creative imitation that the treatise on the sublime offered in its redoubled attention to that process. Boileau's French translation of Longinus' *Peri Hypsous* was accompanied in the same published volume by his imitation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, which performs the type of imitation proposed and repeated within the treatise on the sublime. Dryden's own development of notions of imitation within poetics seems to have occurred just prior to the publication of Boileau's aesthetic works, and is therefore most likely to be influenced by largely English trends. But Dryden's relation to imitation was certainly brought into crisis by the further intensification of Denham and Cowley's concepts offered by Boileau's Longinus.<sup>40</sup> Robert Hume observes that critics have typically divided Dryden's work "roughly into two parts: a dramatic period 1663-80 and a satire and translation period 1680-1700" (Hume 307). It is this division that is the sign of Boileau's influence—regardless of the way in which Denham

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<sup>40</sup> See Robert D. Hume. "Dryden on Creation: 'Imagination' in the Later Criticism." *The Review of English Studies* 21.83 (1970), 295-314, for information about Dryden's development of notions of "ideal imitation" in 1670 and afterward.

and Cowley had provided Longinian notions for a poetics of the 1660s, the reinforcement provided by Boileau of ideas of “creative” imitation and translation allowed Dryden to shift his focus not in the realm of translation *per se*, but in that of poetic genres, from dramatic poetry to satire. Hume lists translation as the other major component of this latter period, but I will argue that, for Dryden (and this pattern will return in the work of the Scriblerians), this shift to satire *is* a shift to translation, and to Longinian Imitation, even if satire and Imitation are not explicitly made identical in Dryden’s own poetic theory. After Dryden, satire is, for a period (that of the Scriblerians) the genre *of* translation, and in this role Scriblerian satire emerges from Cowley’s “Imitation” as well as Longinus’ sublime.

### **2.3. Boileau , Scriblerus, and Longinus: Faith as Auspicious Repetition**

Boileau’s own *Satires* were published in 1666, at a time when he had apparently begun (perhaps with the help of his brother, a classicist) the translation of Longinus.<sup>1</sup> And while they are in some ways quite traditional (i.e. largely reiterations of the concerns of the classical models), Boileau’s *Satires* do bear a significant trace of the Sophistic model of rhetoric proposed by Longinus’ *Peri Hypsous*, which is to say, an emphasis not on achieving truth through satiric critique (i.e. of producing access to a

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<sup>1</sup> See Jules Brody, *Boileau and Longinus* (Geneva: E. Droz, 1958), 12ff.

dialectical account of reality), but on the achievement above all of the *effects* of truth within the act of poetic inscription. The satires are all reworkings of previous satiric models—especially Juvenal, but also Horace and Petronius (whose *Satyricon* was translated into French before its 1694 translation by Burnaby into English—see the preface to Burnaby’s edition). They largely deal with experiences of rejection, disgust, revulsion, especially with regard to wide swaths of the social field (as in “Satire I,” a rewriting of Juvenal’s indictment of the city). As perhaps a sign of his times (and of his particular interests), Boileau’s satires are far more concerned than Juvenal’s with the role of poet, and with the act of writing, so that characters such as Damon in “Satire I” are primarily concerned not with the city’s objectively alienating features, but the conjunction between an aspiring and idealistic poet and the city’s power of reinscribing all writing endeavors within a cheap and corrupt scene of sycophantism.

As a counter to the proliferation of bad writing, Boileau’s satires (and his *Discours du Roy*, published with them) offer a positive model in the figure of Moliere, whose appearance (or in one case, failure to appear) in the poems offers the figure of the poet the opportunity to bear witness to a figure of poetic production who embodies the sublime.<sup>2</sup> Moliere is figured here as a figure towards whom the satiric protagonist must

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<sup>2</sup> Robert T. Corum Jr. writes that in the “Satire II,” the speaker, “in the guise of an aspiring initiate, ...humbly entreats the sainted Moliere to teach him how to discover this core of harmony that is *la rime*. Not unlike divine grace, rhyme appears to be sent from a mysterious external power. ... That the speaker has been coerced into becoming a “Rimeur” implies more than simply his ambition to exercise the poet’s craft

look for an opportunity for imitation—a moment in which to seize the essence of sublimity. This is heightened in Robert T. Corum’s “integrative reading” of the *Satires* as a cumulative text—a simple gesture which opens the possibility of interpreting the various forms of concern with writing and poetics (and the various metaphors, such as eating, that reinforce more overt questions of writing) as a more unified set of concerns that exceeds specific satiric moments and elaborates a fascination with writing in general. The effect of Boileau’s satiric repetition of crises of writing highlights the general attention to the concerns about poetics that emerge in Boileau’s Longinus.

We might, then, see Boileau as already (through his own engagement with classical texts and with writers of his own moment) concerned with the concepts that emerge from Longinus as the fundamental questions of poetics. But Jules Brody’s reading of Boileau’s relation to Longinus suspects something more powerful for the poet, something that would parallel the speaker’s devotion to the figure of Moliere throughout the *Satires*. Brody proposes that the “translation must be regarded as ‘an act

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with less travail. The quest for *rime* extends beyond the realm of the aesthetic to encompass social and moral considerations as well. Satirical poets...continually scrutinize and subsequently castigate their morally and intellectually dull environment in order to juxtapose to this world the higher realm of *rime* and the *raison* that might illuminate the obscurities and incoherences everywhere around them.” Robert T. Corum. *Reading Boileau : An Integrative Study of the Early Satires*. Purdue Studies in Romance Literatures ; V. 15 (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1998), 28.

of faith and adherence.”<sup>3</sup> He is perhaps the only historian of Boileau and the seventeenth century to put it in these terms (which are the repetition of those of the Italian critic Aldo Scaglione, translated for us) and I think that his proposal offers a very powerful way to read Boileau’s relationship to poetics and to Longinus. Brody continues by noting that “If it was not apparent—as it surely should have been—that the turning to Longinus by a man who was never to translate anything else again bespeaks a predilection, then the translation’s strategy and spirit can leave no doubt” (Brody 24).

This lone act of translation in the middle of the production of texts such as the *Satires* and the *Art Poétique* (1674) and *Le Lutrin* (also 1674) serves as an indication that in a fundamental way, the translation of Longinus fits in with the other poetic production of Boileau during this period, so that the poet can propose that they are essentially of a piece—the same type of poetic act. *Le Lutrin*, a mock-heroic rendition of the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, was to offer an opening to poetic repetition in the form of Swift’s *Battel of the Books* and Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (as well as Garth’s *The Dispensary*), and allows us to see Boileau’s moment of translation as a part of a larger concern with a historicization of poetry, and (as with all those concerned with the ancients and moderns) with the establishment of epochal difference. Boileau’s “act of faith and adherence,” however, was an intervention that itself embodied a relation to antiquity

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<sup>3</sup> Brody, 24.

and modernity, establishing faith and adherence to a poetics of imitation that effectively resists the simple question of historical truth asked unceasingly by much of the combatants of the *querelle* in their expression of a concern with literary quality (which epoch is “superior”? Which wins?). Rather than arguing that one can observe two alternatives and decide with a look toward authoritative historical narration that one of the two represents either a progression or a regression,<sup>4</sup> Boileau’s Longinus depicts a project of repetition in which models of sublimity are referenced through rewriting and reworking, and in which the “modern” is refuted not by history (and a narrative of influence) but by its tendency to claim a disconnection from the act of repetition. The modern as that which is “new” is a kind of poetic production that, indeed, Boileau may be willing to admit *as* truly “new” — neither Boileau nor the later Scriblerians will doubt that “original composition,” to put it in Edward Young’s terms, exists.<sup>5</sup> But the Boilevian “new” that we see here differs from the “new” of those who favor the moderns. It is a

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<sup>4</sup> There are other historical narratives possible within the *Querelle*, as indicated by J. M. Levine’s *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). See especially Ch 4 (121-148). But my larger point here is that the relation to antiquity offered by Boileau is not a narrative but a mode of repetition that in fact does not consider narratives of historical progression to be a productive way for the poet to relate to texts, whether ancient or modern.

<sup>5</sup> See Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison. By Edward Young*. (Dublin: printed for P. Wilson, 1759). As I will ultimately suggest (Chapter 4), Young’s arguments coupled with Burke’s sublime make the 1750s seem like the period for the emergence of a set of literary theories that replaces Longinus nearly completely in the writings of the time.

new that, yes, has emerged within poetic practice in his time—an epochal change that has allowed the very awareness of a *Querelle* to emerge.

But in the emergence of such possibility comes, for Boileau, the foreclosure of a relation to the faithfulness that he enacts in the act of translation—not a faithfulness to the accurate reproduction of texts, but a faithfulness to the act of faithfulness itself, which is, for Boileau (and for Longinus) an endangered mode of access to poetic sublimity, an endangerment that cannot be directly expressed as the truth of the present moment without likewise participating in the process of endangerment. Without faith and adherence as active components in the process of writing, the very foundation for the poetic sublime, which is to say, repetition, is relieved of its importance, and writing becomes “modern.” The sublime is the register, in Boileau’s translative poetic liturgy, of a mode of affective relation to writing that is fundamentally opposite to the modern—not opposite as in a relation of negative particularity (the “negation of the negation”), but opposite in its *different* particularity, that which is *indifferent* in the sense of its absence of relation.<sup>6</sup> Boileau’s act of faith is an adherence *to* faith itself, a redoubling of the relation of adherence, that only serves as a “critique” of the modern in that it

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<sup>6</sup> This is one of the dangers of the sophists, for Plato—those anti-philosophers who threaten the regime of truth and property by producing stand-ins for these figures that have no common structural features with them, in spite of whatever resemblance might exist. In Boileau, a different rendition of the moment of writing is being generated that can take the place of definitions of writing that rely on figures animated by the *logos*. See Plato. *Plato’s Parmenides*. trans. R. E. Allen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

performs a incommensurable difference from that modernity. His concern with writing in the *Satires* is a concern with the possibility of a world in which faithful repetition has itself been cast out into the rural wilderness, a world in which Moliere's promised appearance at a grotesque feast turns out to be a ruse in order to keep captive those for whom poetics is an act of faith. The faithful adherent is vulnerable, in "Satire III," to manipulation (despite his absolute revulsion at all of the "new" that surrounds him), and this is certainly one of the difficulties of faith. The modern is the corrupt scene from which temptation emerges, and the poet, if he is to remain productive of sublime affect within his work, must resist this temptation, and adhere to a repetitive poetic practice that allows the "new" to develop only within the context of faith.

It was perhaps something of this faith that motivated the post-Boileau Dryden in the 1680s when he was engaged in producing an extensive corpus of translations that had become more of the imitative than the emulative variety. Stuart Gillespie describes the moment in which Dryden's desire to translate coincided with both the desire to publish translations on the part of Jacob Tonson, and the desire to consume translations on the part of the public.<sup>7</sup> The *Miscellanies* and other translations of important classical texts (Plutarch's *Lives*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Epistles*, and many others) that resulted

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart Gillespie. "The Early Years of the Dryden-Tonson Partnership: The Background to Their Composite Translations and *Miscellanies* of the 1680s." *Restoration* 12 (1988), 10-19.

from this coincidence of desires was perhaps as opportunistic as it was faithful. But the commitment to translation on the part of Dryden and the growing coterie of translators employed by Tonson indicates an increasing dedication, whether related to Boileau directly or not, to the act of translation as a repetition that brings into being a sense of *project* (at this time the Earl of Roscommon produced a crucial *Essay on Translated Verse* as well as the foundation of a translating “academy” in which principles of translation could be brought into practice<sup>8</sup>). The group that emerges around Dryden in this period—those engaged in Roscommon’s academy as well as those employed by Tonson to translate classical texts (and there was some overlap in these groups—see Gillespie 14-15)—represents a concerted engagement with translation practice as such, in which a coterie worked in varying combinations (especially in the popular *Miscellanies* of classical verse published by Tonson largely under Dryden’s supervision) engaged in a repetitive literary practice that differed substantially from the “wretched scribblers”<sup>9</sup> whose translations simultaneously fetishized and made a mockery of imitative repetition by their use of paraphrase and literal translation. Gillespie notes that Tonson himself, trying his hand at poetry, writes in the preface to Creech’s translation of

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<sup>8</sup> See Gillespie 14, as well as Carl Niemeyer. “The Earl of Roscommon’s Academy.” *Modern Language Notes* 49.7 (1934).

<sup>9</sup> Dryden’s term from the *Life of Lucian*, cited by Gillespie 10.

Lucretius that “Horace we have in Paraphrastick dress,/(They who enlarge his Poems, make ‘em less)” (Gillespie 13), and the “overlapping circles” that seem to have orbited Dryden in the 1680s were engaged in producing translation that did not “less[en]” the works through fetishization—dogmatic adherence to one of the extremes of translation. The fetish of the literal is, in Dryden and Roscommon’s ideas of translation, a foreclosure on sublimity, which exists as it does in Boileau’s Longinus as a possibility of poetic judgment—what Longinus calls the *kairos* of the moment of encounter, in which the power of language to achieve affective results is available within an act of decision on the part of the poet. The translating coteries of the 1680s were convinced that translation itself was an embodiment of the essence of the poetic act, which is to say, the opening of poetic writing to the *kairos* of judgment, an emergent opportunity for an act of decision that could neither exist in the face of the absolutely “new” of the modern or the literalistic adherence to the ancient in “Paraphrastick” translation.

To further describe the genre of Imitation, I must cite W.K. Wimsatt, who, citing Austin Warren’s work as that which we all must by now have learned to repeat, observes that the Imitation in the Augustan period is a well known phenomenon that can be preserved “[i]f only we keep reiterating the compensating principle that the escape from models *was* freedom, *was* expression, *was* fun, only so long as the models were preserved and were present as fields of reference for the realization of new meanings. An imitation of a classic model is always a reference *to* and only thus a

departure *from* the model.”<sup>10</sup> Wimsatt provides an explanation of the genre of Imitation that coincides with the one I am assembling here, an act of citation that opens up an occasion of difference, a finding of something idiosyncratic within the same—with the exception that Wimsatt’s “freedom” needs to be made into a euphemism for another concept, a concept that is the opposite of the naïve claims of freedom often attributed to an autonomous realm of aesthetics. It is not negative freedom that results from imitative repetition in writing, for Boileau and, later, the Scriblerians—this kind of freedom would be not much more than a sad illusion if it were claimed by those who adhere to the act of imitation. Freedom is a fundamentally ideological concept, and applying it to the poetic act invites a critical reading that spots the way in which this term seeks to intervene in the interest of literary conservatism or another more directly political end, something like the Kantian freedom provided by the moral law that establishes duty as the only viably valuable behavior for rational creatures.

The Boilevian rendition of Longinus, and the genre of Imitation in its more Boilevian tendencies, indicate that there is an affective and forceful phenomenon that can emerge from the acts of reading and writing. The sublime presented in 1674 is that

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<sup>10</sup> William K. Wimsatt. "Imitation as Freedom, 1717-1798." *New Literary History* 1.2 (1970), 218. Of Austin Warren, Wimsatt writes, "[t]he idea that burlesque and imitation were Augustan avenues of departure from the solemn moods and constricting genre norms of the tradition, and thus of escape into a large, free realm of poetic creation, was expounded about twenty years ago by Austin Warren. I assume it as a demonstrated or at least as a persuasively argued and now more or less commonly received principle, which we can invoke to advantage" (217-8).

feature of language that is both entangled, entwined, implicit to the linguistic act, and, in spite of being caught up in this act, in its nature fundamentally non-linguistic and productive of difference—indeed, it is the only proper pathway to difference, the only way that sublimity’s cohabitation with sameness can be materialized effectively. It is certainly an uncanny production, although this will become more the case after the demise of Scriblerian satire, when the sublime becomes more closely aligned with the uncanny and the figure of the return of the repressed.<sup>11</sup> The sublime for Boileau and for the Scriblerians is not an escape from language, knowledge, or the *logos*, and it is not quite the return of something which served in its repression to establish the regime of normality. It is implicit with, and different from, the *logos*, and can, according to Boileau, be recruited to perform work that is affective, bodily, material, and transformative. The sublime in this account is that feature of poetics that enables poetry, makes it function as excess, gives it its special status. But it is also precarious—if the function of the linguistic act is given over to the *logos*, which is to say, order, logic, reason, knowledge, then in Boileau’s depiction this occludes the sublimity of language, and makes the linguistic act into a production of that overwhelming dullness with which Pope later, the last Scriblerian faithfully culminating Boileau’s concern, closes off the era of the sublime.

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<sup>11</sup> For Freud’s theory of *das unheimlich*, see Sigmund Freud. *The Uncanny*. Penguin Classics (London ; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 121ff.

In *Peri Hypsous*, (*Traité du Sublime*) as translated by Boileau, Longinus' concern with presenting sublimity takes the form of repeated exemplary performances by textual example. It is a periphrastic elaboration of the poetic sublime that, as both Pope and Boileau say, claims in its own construction to participate in the same sublimity as the examples it provides.<sup>12</sup> Nowhere does Longinus attempt to provide a schematic account of the rules of the sublime—his descriptions of the sublime are repeated gestures toward that ineffable element that Boileau repeatedly refers to with the vagueness of the empty adjective “une certaine”—an ineffable feature of writing that exists within the very moment of the act, and is not available as a rule or as example that would fully govern the act of writing. Barbara Warnick proposes that Boileau stresses this ineffability, creating a mystery where there was none. “Whereas Longinus sought to demystify sublimity by giving examples and showing how its effects were achieved, Boileau sought to envelop the Sublime in an aura of mystery and ineffability so that it was discernible only to a man of taste—the classical critic instantiated in Boileau himself.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Boileau writes of Longinus that “He would not commit the same Fault he laid to the Charge of Cecilius, who, says he, wrote of the Sublime in a Low Stile; for when he treats of the Beauties of Elocution, he makes use of all its Graces; he often employs the Figure he teaches, and in talking of the Sublime, is himself most Sublime.” Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux. *The Works of Monsieur Boileau, Made English from the Last Paris Edition, by Several Hands. To Which Is Prefix'd His Life, Written to Joseph Addison, Esq; by Mr. Des Maizeaux. And Some Account of This Translation by N. Rowe, Esq.* (London: printed for E. Sanger, and E. Curll, 1712) , 2.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Warnick. “The Bolevian Sublime in Eighteenth-Century British Rhetorical Theory.” *Rhetorica* 8.4 (1990), 352-3.

While Warnick's account of Boileau's tendencies is instructive, it is not clear that Longinus sought to provide a schematic of poetics that would encourage democratic access, just as it is unclear that the particular type of mystery stressed in Boileau's "une certaine" and the larger emphasis on ineffability are motivated by elitism or self-interest. The elitism of satire is a significant part of the satires of Boileau and his followers. And while there is no doubt that a rudimentary version of class warfare governed concerns about writing and access during the period, I would argue that Boileau's Longinus proposes an elitist poetics as the only possible poetics—elitism as one of the essential elements of poetics. This elitism is an attitude toward textuality before it is an engagement with an empirical problem, so that when Dryden, Swift, Pope and Johnson repeat Juvenal's satire of the city, the pernicious effects of the masses are an end result of a hypostasis and proliferation of the relationship to language that closes down the possibility of sublime poetics, rather than the other way around. The only chain of causality that seems to emerge from Boileau and the Scriblerians is that from writing outward to the world, even if these worldly effects are not absolutely determined or unmediated by other factors. This "mysticism" encouraged by Boileau is indeed a significant feature of the theory of the sublime here, although differently so than it will be later for Burke. In a sense, it is a matter of deferring expectation: the categories of sublime poetics depicted here seem on the surface to be analytical categories—divisions of the sublime into modes or into its affective orientation—but each is ultimately

oriented toward an enactment of the encounter of the writer with the act of writing, a moment made possible only by the imitative relation to past example.

These exemplary illustrations are performances of sublimity that require a kind of mediation on the part of the theorist that *testifies*, that claims to work as witness to the sublimity of the text. In performing this testimony, the critic provides the imperative to repeat the production of the sublime: to imitate, and in this imitation, to exceed the linguistic elements of this act in the name language's implicit self-transcendence. The textual examples are themselves not the "object" of the study—it is the relationship between the descriptive account written by Longinus and the textual examples from the already "classical" antiquity of Attic Greece that emerges as the prominent feature of the *Traité*. Much as with Corum's reading of the *Satires*, the elements function as a periphrastic performance, in their repetition around the text's central figure (Boileau's term is "*circonduction*," a neologism) an intensification of the gesture towards the sublime. The procedure of periphrase here is as much concerned with the very act of repetition itself as it is providing a variety of images—or, rather, both repetition and variety contribute to the same result because variety is only a repetitive act within the treatise. Michael Edwards comments on the significance of Boileau's attention to periphrasis in the *Traité du Sublime*, noting that Boileau revised Longinus' depiction of periphrasis as "a risky business,...more so than any of the other figures." In Boileau's translation, this warning issued by Longinus becomes a claim that periphrase is like no

other figure in its support of the sublime.<sup>14</sup> Repetition itself—imitation--produces the possibility of recuperating the act of writing within the testimony to writing as event, so that the poetic act is a witness to the existence of that which cannot speak, but continually inheres as the vital feature of the moment of writing.<sup>15</sup> It is simultaneously a revelation and a concealment: this is no doubt responsible for the “mystification” that, for Warnick, restricts access to poetics—the sublime’s devotion to that which cannot become explicit.

Longinus represents this moment of revealed concealment with the term *kairos*, a term of the Sophists which has a complicated history of interpretation in the West.<sup>16</sup> *Kairos* is a conjunction of temporality and propriety, so that most often it seems to indicate a moment at which an intervention can be made, a moment that can be seized in order to provide the proper word, the proper supplement. As noted by William Race, there is an indication of exchange in the term—the “proper amount” to be paid or

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Edwards. "A Meaning for Mock-Heroic." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 15 (1985), 53.

<sup>15</sup> For the recuperation of this term as that which can engage the Holocaust in its difficult (non)articulation, see Giorgio Agamben. *Remnants of Auschwitz : The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. (New York: Zone Books, 1999). For his theory of fidelity and event that corresponds very effectively with the adherence to the poetic sublime, see Alain Badiou. *Ethics : An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. trans. Peter Hallward (London ; New York: Verso, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> See Brody 40-42; See also James Kinneavy. “Kairos: A Neglected Concept in Classical Rhetoric” in Jean Dietz Moss, ed. *Rhetoric and Praxis : The Contribution of Classical Rhetoric to Practical Reasoning* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986).

exchanged (198-9). And the element of propriety gestures towards a normativity, a correctness, so that it would seem that the “moment” indicated by *kairos* offers a limited response within the margins of the proper.<sup>17</sup>

Brought to contemporary attention by the theology of Paul Tillich, who highlights its importance as fully temporal concept, *kairos* has become an important figure for composition and rhetorical studies, especially with regard to the opening to context that it produces at the point of linguistic action.<sup>18</sup> Tillich proposes what seems to be a Longinian or Sophistic version of the concept translated into a broader realm of extra-linguistic action. “A moment of time, an event, deserves the name of Kairos, fullness of time in the precise sense, if it can be regarded in its relation to the Unconditioned, if it speaks of the Unconditioned, and if to speak of it is at the same time to speak of the Unconditioned.... [T]rue knowledge is knowledge born of the Kairos, that is, of the fate of the time, of the point at which time is disturbed by eternity” (Tillich 173). The “fullness” experienced by the writer or poet: the moment in which choice of figure, word, strategy or emphasis can bear witness to that element of what Tillich calls

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<sup>17</sup> Contrary to nearly every other recent rendition of the term, W. Race attempts to deemphasize these temporal aspects in order to stress its normative and conservative power. See William H. Race. "The Word Kairos in Greek Drama." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 111 (1981).

<sup>18</sup> Paul Tillich, N. A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey. *The Interpretation of History*. (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1936). James Kinneavy's work deserves the credit for making *kairos* available to its secular application in composition and rhetorical studies in the last 20 years.

fate (or the Unconditioned) but we might call the *implicit*. The Unconditioned is that which can fund the opening within the conditional of the life of the moment—an element, in Longinus’ repetitions of this concept, of the non-linguistic always possible within language.<sup>19</sup> It is the experience of the moment of writing *as* significant, as a *moment*, which is to say, a fleeting instant in which an opening to decision has arrived—the possibility exists *now* for the proper decision, the proper response, and this is the impetus to rise to the challenge. For Tillich this concept comes most likely through its genealogical development in St. Paul, Kierkegaard and Heidegger.<sup>20</sup> The *kairos* for Longinus is not something that occurs objectively, but is that in which the rhetor or poet is engaged in creating. It is the only “proper” scene of poetics, and is that which, for Longinus, makes poetics as such a different linguistic performance from that of other forms of writing. In the *Traité du Sublime*, the engagement with the Unconditioned element of language that occurs in the *kairos* of writing allows an opening to poetics to be cited in the act of writing. It is this citation of the full moment, the decision itself, fixed within a context but not determined by that context, which produces, in Longinus, the sublime. The sublime event of writing is the inauguration in the writing subject of an

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<sup>19</sup> This is also analyzable within the Lacanian analytic, with the Unconditioned as the Real, as productive of the lack expressed from within the symbolic for the *objet a*. See Slavoj Žižek. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Short Circuits (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> See also Žižek, 134ff.

experience of transport, and this transport is experienced in a formal sense as truth—as the truth of language that language itself hides.

I will now examine some of these trends in Longinus' treatise, in Rowe's translation of Boileau in the 1712 *Works*.<sup>21</sup> The depictions there of *kairos* are later targeted by the Scriblerian coterie in the other major work given *prima facie* attribution to Martinus Scriblerus, *Peri Bathous, or, The Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728). Looking finally at this Scriblerian treatise on the "profound" will bring us back to the theme of the modern scene of writing. It is precisely the poetic production of *kairos* that adherents to this sublime represent as endangered by modern dogmatism in writing, and this endangerment is made into apocalyptic apotheosis in Pope's final *Dunciad*, which this perspective on the Scriblerians allows us to re-read in these terms of *kairos* and *logos* as a critique of the aesthetics of modernity.

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<sup>21</sup> Other than the feature of his timeliness, and his general affinity with Scriblerian poetics, I have no special affinity for Rowe—I deal with his tragedy *The Fair Penitent* briefly in Chapter 4, but as translator he holds no special place in this development. It would be just as relevant to use Smith's or Welsted's translations. I have removed the italicization but preserved the capitalization from Rowe's translation.

## 2.4. *Scriblerus, Anti-Poet*

“Stile is divided by the Rhetoricians into the Proper and the Figured. Of the Figur’d we have already treated, and the Proper is what our Authors have nothing to do with.”

– Scriblerus, *Peri Bathous*

The act of testimony performed by Longinus and Boileau is, as I offer above, an act of revelation (providing the gesture that engages that which cannot speak) and an act of concealment (positing the implicit feature of language as a non-linguistic element that cannot be named). This is demonstrated by what seems at first to be an ambivalence towards whether the sublime can be accessed by prescription. Longinus/Boileau/Rowe conveys that the most important goal for any person who writes “consists in shewing how and by what Means the Thing taught is to be acquir’d” (12). But this “how and what Means” is not the *technē* of the sublime; it is not the acquisition of knowledge that will allow sublimity to be engaged as a skillful performance. Rather, the “how and what means” is, perversely, the path to concealment itself. True sublimity resides in the ability to place *technē* under erasure in the moment of writing. If this is not performed well, then it seems as though one has tried too hard, or has had too much personally at stake. Longinus observes that the sublime is the way to prevent the jarring revelation that in

writing, one pursues a goal or gain. “The Sublime is a wonderful Help to Figures,” he writes, in that it does not allow them to be associated with technique.

[T]is certain that those Discourses, wherein Figures are us’d alone [without the aid of the sublime] are suspected of themselves to be Designing, Artificial, and Deceitful; especially when they are spoken before a Sovereign Judge; and above all, if that Judge is a Great Lord, as a Tyrant, a King, or a General of an Army: For he conceives within himself an Indignation against the Orator, and cannot bear to hear a Vile Rhetorician pretend to deceive him like a Child, with gross Devices (48).

One effect of the sublime within writing is, then, to hide any use of *technē*, whether this *technē* is actually present in the act or not—either way, the sublime provides cover for intention and manipulative technique.<sup>22</sup> The sublime and its counterpart the “Pathetick” are that which makes the art of writing into something impossible to describe—an ineffable craft that can only be performed within imitative reference to prior performances. They “enter thro’ their Natural Affinity to the Emotions of the Soul, or because of their Lustre, appear more, and seem to touch our

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<sup>22</sup> Michel Deguy observes of the Longinian sublime, “[t]he height of art consists in dissimulating one’s artifices, in covering up one’s twists and turns, in rendering nonapparent one’s figures, one’s unacknowledgeable ruses: the fire of the sublime, founding all of its components, transports the listeners (readers) into *ekstasis*, to the point where they see nothing but fire.” See Deguy. “The Discourse of Exaltation: Contribution to a Rereading of Pseudo-Longinus.” trans. Jeffrey S. Librett in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Understanding nearer than the Figures, the Art of which they hide; and serve as a Cover for them" (49). This periphrastic explanation fails to provide a mechanism for how all of this works—precisely its point, producing the artless concealment that enables the sublime. This cannot be a conscious dissembling, though—the conscious or overt dissembling of artlessness is just another show of art or *technē*, and would still need the supplement of the sublime in order to escape being trapped in the realm of intention and calculation. It may be that artfulness is present to the writer, but it is also that which is erased in writing that engages the sublime, and thus has no knowable effect at the very moment of writing. The "Pathetick has never more Effect than when the Orator [writer] does not seem to have studied it, and it looks as if it was produc'd only by the Occasion it self" (50). This occasion, the apparition of *kairos* within the act of writing, is that which can obscure the element of corruption that has been introduced into writing by *technē*. If the sense of occasion can be produced, if it can be made to dominate the scene of writing, then the scope of temporal consciousness is transformed, from that of chronological time (*chronos*) to that of the full moment that seeks to birth writing as an event (*kairos*).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Of chronological time within this contrast, John E. Smith writes, "[t]ime, in the *chronos* sense, permits, as the term implies, a chronology to be constructed, and therefore a chronicle of events which forms the initial material for the writing of history. But considering no more than the facts of process, of measuring time elapsed and the 'before' and 'after' of events, leaves us without the purpose, the significance and the evaluating interest which are the necessary ingredients both of historical action and of historical interpretation." John E. Smith. "Time, Times, and the 'Right Time', Chronos and Kairos." *The Monist* 53.1

Where does this temporal consciousness reside, though—is this the writer or the reader whose awareness of the possible corruption of writing is put in abeyance by the experience of sublimity? It is more than this, I would argue, and this feature also stands as an important facet of Martinus Scriblerus' relation to the sublime. While there is certainly a concern with effect, so that the *object* of writing, the reader, is depicted as variously transported or made suspicious by the rhetor's attempts, there is also a repeated engagement with the writer's own experience *as* reader. Regardless of whether the writer has studied the use of figures, and thus acquired a *technē*, he or she will engage textual example in the act of producing the sublime, thereby repeating the scene of a prior moment of *kairos* experienced by the reader who is now a writer. Textual example serves to both deflect attention to the art of writing that can be learned through study, and toward the way in which the act of writing is a repetition of a prior moment of sublimity, a moment being testified to by the present scene.

In this testimony the "power" of the sublime is applied to as an already existing moment of transport in which subjectivity was experienced differently—this reference to

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(1969), 2. The "purpose" emerges as opportunity, as moment *of* purpose rather than a moment whose purpose or meaning arrives objectively for the individual. This feeling, as I will suggest, is a component of individuality as such, offering a model of subjectivity that opposes itself to the factual/historical model dependent on *chronos*.

a prior act is itself that which, if taken up by the individual, produces a different conception of subjectivity. The subject that can emerge in the sublime act of writing is the subject whose engagements with the implicit sublimity of language (and thus to subjective “excess”) allow the possibility of an ongoing recurrence, as long as this use of the sublime can avoid a kind of addictive relation in which the writer is tempted to make a fetish of those features in textual example which may have produced the original transport. Sublimity requires “une certaine” restraint, which is to say the ability to “guide one’s self with prudence” (14). It is an engagement of prudence, or the conviction that *kairos* emerges in the act of writing, the moment in which it is prudent to act, and to act prudently; imitative reference to prior moments of prudent action is, in this poetics, the way to allow one’s own prudence to take shape. It is in one sense an enthusiasm: “these great Beauties which we meet with in the Works of the Ancients, are like so many Sacred Springs, from whence arise those happy Vapours which infuse themselves into the Souls of their Imitators, and animate those very Minds with a Warmth they never receiv’d from Nature; so that they are at the Instant [*kairos*], as it were ravish’d and transported by another’s Enthusiasm” (38).

At the same time, it is a mode of combat, an anxiety of influence, as it were, whose motivation to the sublime is driven by “A Noble Jealousy” (38, citing Hesiod). This combat, however, does not involve maintaining rigid self-definition, as with our earlier examination of the moderns in Swift’s *Battel*, in which jealousy or perceived

scarcity was based on a refusal of imitation as a valid task. Here, for Longinus, the metaphor of combat is just another periphrastic way of, as Jonathan Lamb says, not letting the cat out of the bag. The depiction of aggression is one mode of sublime affect that can emerge from the imitative testimony to prior sublimities, especially if those prior examples help to produce a moment of action whose proper engagement is to fight. But it after all depends on the situation, and it is perhaps just as likely that the sublime is experienced as a shared intimacy, a direct theophany of soul to soul within the act of imitation. Regardless of the metaphor, it is the production of propriety that counts, the formal evocation of the moment of writing as that in which there is an opportunity to choose the proper figure, the proper word, or to imitate properly. This encounter with writing is not normative in its content, but the propriety at work is formally normative in the sense that it is itself the experience of a faithful repetition of what has been, through the act of reading, engaged as another's faithful repetition of a prior act. There are moments of "origin" in Longinus' account—Demosthenes is exemplary here as the case of one for whom imitation was *not* the proper engagement with *kairos*. Through his seemingly natural sublimity, "he has outdone the most Famous Orators in all Ages; leaving 'em as it were, confounded and dazl'd with his Thunders and Lightnings: For in those Parts of Oratory, wherein he excels, he is so much above 'em, that he sufficiently makes amends for those Parts, wherein he was wanting" (72). As *sui generis* orator, Demosthenes is the great example who proves the rule here. While

Homer is the figure whose origins are lost in the absence of textual predecessors (and not mentioned as important), Demosthenes stands out as an origin in order to indicate that his own works are responses to a *kairos* for which the proper act was origination. When necessary, one must create in order to preserve an opening to imitative sublimity.

Scriblerus is not depicted as an *autopoietic* origin of himself, of course—rather, his origins indicate a hyperbolic extension of citation to its more absurd extremities, so that in the *Memoirs* we are overwhelmed with his birth from out of scholarly textual reference. The coterie relationship from which Scriblerus arises as an emergent and virtual figure is also not original—it is certainly a citation of and an alternative to Addison’s various clubs, and it is also a citation of the fabled coterie of friends depicted in La Fontaine’s *Les Amours de Psyché* (1669), which begins: “Four Friends, whose Acquaintance began by the Muses [*par le Parnasse*], form’d a kind of Society, which I shou’d call academical, had their Number been greater, or had Letters been as much their Object as Pleasure. The first Rule they prescrib’d to themselves, was, to banish Disputations of a regular kind, and all that might have the Air of an academical Conference.”<sup>24</sup> This society of those who would eliminate academic dogma from French

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<sup>24</sup> Jean de La Fontaine. *The Loves of Cupid and Psyche; in Verse and Prose. From the French of La Fontaine, ... To Which Are Prefix’d, a Version of the Same Story, from the Latin of Apuleius. With a New Life of La Fontaine, Extracted from a Great Variety of Authors. The Whole Illustrated with Notes. By Mr. Lockman.* (London: printed for H. Chapelle, 1744), 107.

letters was known as “Les Amis de Psyché” and was rumored to have consisted of La Fontaine, Racine, Moliere, and Boileau. Jean Demeure has written extensively in the early part of the previous century on these rumours, and has found the coterie to be “unlocatable” [*introuvable*], the product of literary speculation that hid a romantically wishful revisioning of the authors’ relationships.<sup>25</sup> And I must add to any list of possible influences of Scriblerus the “friendship” that presides over the work of Katherine Philips and the coterie she was driven to constantly generate and mourn in her poetry.<sup>26</sup>

Scriblerus is also an engagement with, a citation of, the critique of modernity, and as such, is a figure whose existence is the sign of a break or a transformation that has made vital differences distinguishable. As a product of “friends,” Scriblerus serves to anchor a relationship dedicated to the conjunction between one kind of poetic act (Pope’s original plan was to publish the “works of the unlearned,” which is to say, the Scriblerian satire of both common sense and the abuse of learning) and the bonds

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<sup>25</sup> Philip Wadsworth summarizes Demeure’s findings with perhaps a notable *joie d’assertion*: he “conclusively disproved the long-persisting legend of a classical school, according to which Racine, Boileau, La Fontaine, and Moliere worked together intimately as a literary group, discussing their artistic problems as they strolled together in the gardens of Versailles; unlike the romantics, French classical authors worked independently, without benefit of coalitions or manifestoes.” Philip A. Wadsworth. “New Views of French Classicism, in Relation to the Baroque.” *The French Review* 25.3 (1952), 173.

<sup>26</sup> See most recently Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger. “Katherine Philips and Coterie Critical Practices.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37.3 (2004).

between individuals who were devoted to it.<sup>27</sup> Patricia Bruckmann notes that “the Scriblerian sense of the club as a driving force, out to reform, gave a power to their rhetoric and certain kinds of predictable limits” (15). As I have stressed, reform starts with what is figured by the Scriblerians as a crisis in poetics. Out of this perception emerged a friendship, and out of what is exhibited as a concern with friendship in its relation to writing emerged the figure of Scriblerus. These social relations are extrapolated in other ways by the group—in Pope’s various innovations in publishing practice, for instance, or in Swift’s intervention in the Drapier coinage, or in the attitudes toward social bonds in Gay’s poetry. The social features of the linguistic concern travel outward from the figure of Scriblerus, extending by the vehicle of satire to cover much of the social terrain. This extension is possible because Scriblerian satiric writing engages itself constantly with producing the *kairos* of an impending or recently achieved modernity—this engagement with the modern is at the same time an engagement with sublimity that exposes other, less timely, forms of writing as similarly connected to the corruption, decadence, filth, and dogmatism of the modernity the Scriblerians depict.

The *Peri Bathous* is the place to look for the most direct evidence of this confrontation on the linguistic level. The text, ostensibly a parody of Longinus, is a

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<sup>27</sup> See Patricia C. Brückmann. *A Manner of Correspondence: A Study of the Scriblerus Club*. (McGill Queens Univ Pr, 1997), 3.

treatise on a mode of poetics that would make the language of poetry available to common readers, to those who fail to attain the sublime heights of poetic citation of ancient models (something that became a less satirical concern later in the century). The treatise is a repetition of Swift's *Battel*, and begins with the author (Scriblerus, although it was printed as a joint production of Swift and Pope in the 1728 *Miscellanies*) explaining that the goal of the moderns should be that of "leveling" the ancients so their high Parnassus would be accessible to more "reasonable" writers.<sup>28</sup> The sheer numbers of the moderns (a reiteration of Swift's earlier distinction) indicates that the pressure to level the mountain is going to become, very soon, overwhelming. Here comes modernity. Instead of a fight, what Scriblerus wants for his moderns is a treatise that will lead to an essentially leveling poetics, a counterweight to Longinus. The concerns attributed to the "wiser" of the moderns are "Profit or Gain; in order to acquire which, 'tis necessary to procure Applause, by administring Pleasure to the Reader: from whence it follows demonstrably, that their Productions must be suited to the present Taste" (89). This pleasure, if nothing else, is a mirror image of that communicable feature of the sublime that inheres in its repetition. The profit-minded poets of the bathos are fundamentally

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse in Two Volumes. By Jonathan Swift, D.D. And Alexander Pope, Esq; to Which Is Added, a Poem Written on the North-Window of the Deanary-House of St. Patrick's, Dublin.* The second edition. ed. vol. 2 ([Dublin]: London printed, and re-printed in Dublin, by and for Sam. Fairbrother, 1728), 86.

opposed to their opposites in that they are engaged in an accumulative project—the *chronos* of profit contains here the relation to the reader, so that all such pleasure communicated will be recouped in the name of profit—and unabashedly so (this is, after all, no secret trades manual, but a guide to making poetry “common”).

*Peri Bathous* is in effect a guide to the many ways within writing that the opening to *kairos* valued by Longinus can be prevented. Above all else, its depiction of the moderns’ project is a handbook for preventing the appearance of a crucial moment, an opening to an event that might be seized by writers in the name of that opening. Here, what is seized is the moment of modernity’s groundswell, providing the great occasion for Scriblerus to write his treatise. But the treatise repeatedly disclaims the production of *kairos*, providing instance after instance of ways to prevent it. Poetry is “of dangerous consequence to the state” if suppressed and censored, so it should be set free to be deprived of the *kairos* of the moment of explosion that comes from suppression. Common sense (93) serves to eliminate the possibility of a poet achieving excellence, and thus of providing strong example and indicating the legitimacy of greatness. Mixture of styles, genres, and figures is useful to the moderns in its ability to confound reference and make devotion to imitative writing impossible (93). The act of “chusing and separating such Circumstances in a Description as illustrate or elevate the Subject” (103) must be disallowed and countermanded by a “prolixity” of description so that “Choice and Distinction” become impossible within the moment of reading.

The mode of imitation proposed by the treatise (for it must deal with this idea in some parodic way) can operate in either of two ways: “the First is when we force to our own Purposes the Thoughts of others; The Second consists in copying the Imperfections, or Blemishes of celebrated Authors” (108). This is hardly subtle, but it reminds us that imitation for the moderns is a difficult idea to fit within the insistence on the “new,” or on the autonomy of the modern. This focus on innovation is, here (and in Swift’s *Battel*) the antithesis of *kairos*, so that the modern vision is that of a world in which the new is produced without occasion, without propriety—as a reflex or habit that removes any experience of temporality other than the chronological (that of progression). “The true Genius,” we are told, “rarely fails” when faced with “such occasions” as are associated with sublime poetics—rarely fails, that is, to provide “Points, Conceits, and Proper Similes” to “avoid throwing themselves or their Readers into any indecent Transports” (109). Here, *kairos* is allowed, as long as it is used to conceal itself—as long as what results is the erasure of *kairos*, and the accompanying prominence of *technē*. This theme continues, and is generally essential to the Scriblerian tract’s response to Longinus. Writing’s genius must be made *explicit*, and the artfulness must be staged in order to reveal the writer’s particular knowledge of such “rules.” Figures should “refer exactly the Mold in which they were form’d, in all its Inequalities, Cavities, Obliquities, odd Crannies, and Distortions” (109-10). The particularities that emerge from this figural revelation are not concerned to produce variety as much as they are designed to display

an excess of attention to the art of writing. Writing must become meta-writing if it is to attain the ultimate bathos that will nullify the writing act.

This is repeated, of course, in the *Dunciad's* great paratextual apparatus, a virtuoso performance of the age's critics (Bentley, Wotton, Dennis, et al.) and their supplementation of text with prescriptive commentary. Like the "mist" of obscurity that a truly bathetic writer will wrap around "Thought" (114), paratext serves to obscure the text's ability to claim for itself the intervention into a moment, the saying of the proper words—the possibility of writing as event. The *Dunciad Variorum* is an achievement like none other in the field of textual containment, in the performance of dogmatic critical technique. The later four-book *Dunciad*, which still preserves the paratext, is oriented toward slightly different goals, and might be said to exceed the bathetic forces of modernity in its vision of apocalypse—a truly sublime performance to end all sublime performances. To avoid anti-climax here, however, which is one of the most effective bathetic maneuvers ("where the second line drops quite short of the first, than which nothing creates greater Surprise" (115)), I will return to my concerns at the beginning of this discussion, which will now appear different in the light of this discussion of temporality: now it is time to conclude by reinserting this rhetorical conception of sublimity into the discussion of "implication," skepticism, and the question of the nature of the "aesthetic" autonomy proposed by the Scriblerians.

Noggle's *Skeptical Sublime* deserves much more extensive treatment, ultimately, and I think that the emendation of the narrative with a serious consideration of the Longinian sublime and what it supplies to "Tory satire" is an appropriate way to pay homage to and extend his work. Roland Barthes, in a lecture in May of 1978 that has recently been published in a volume called *The Neutral*, provides an excellent distinction between skepticism and sophism that might help us to distinguish between the Pyrrhonism and Longinian Sophistry of the Scriblerians' moment. Both sophists and skeptics are engaged with *kairos*, in Barthes' account: "Both cases are about a modification of the temporality of discourse; normal, rhetorical temporality: heavy, coated, compacted temporality, logical consistency of the 'development' .... However:

- a. Temporality of the Sophist discourse by jolts, zigzags, catches: hunting for the "right moment." The tension thus is continuous, lengthy lookout → discourse of mastery: the "right moment" = weapon of power: today we should say: political swell.
- b. Temporality of the skeptic discourse (behavior): there are times to mark time: times of the *tacet*, of the blank → it is all about undoing the time of the system, about putting moments of flight in it, about preventing the system from taking. The virtual system of Skepticism, if it could manage never to

stop uttering contingency (conjuncture), would be the device for undoing mastery, for a-power.<sup>29</sup>

There are elements of both at work in the Scriblerians' project: as Noggle senses, however, there are ways in which Scriblerian satire is unable and unwilling to resort to absolute negation. There *is* a faith in writing as that which can enable subjectivity, as that which can produce an experience of excess that, were it not a category of *logos*, we could call truth. Let us call it sophistic truth—the insistence that truth takes place only in powerful moments of transport. The “right moment” is above all what the Scriblerians wanted to preserve—not their particular historical moment, but the ability to produce the sophistic “jolt” that enables *kairos* and makes writing into a “weapon of power.” It is possible that this might mean, in other times, “political swell,” but for the Scriblerus club the swell was already threatened with its absolute indistinction—the leveling masses of the bathetic were any day going to overrun the prominence of Parnassus, and do away with the “elitism” of the Longinian sublime. The skeptical “Moments of flight” are certainly an aspect of Scriblerian writing, perhaps most strongly in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and Swift's *Travels*. But this flight is far less common than a reinscription of

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<sup>29</sup> Roland Barthes. *The Neutral : Lecture Course at the College De France (1977-1978)*. trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Dennis Hollier. European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 170.

commitment in their writing: a commitment above all else to being able to powerfully show that now is the right time, and to offer the possibility that, in this fleeting moment, the adherence to example, to friendship, and to the intensity of moment itself (momentousness) can preserve that implicit feature of language that enables the openness and hope of the *kairos* of writing.

### 3. Metamorphosis, Virtuality, Occasion: The Scriblerian *Carmen Perpetuum*

Scriblerian satire is a product of a sublime aesthetic repetition, but there is a further set of influences and poetic commonalities that need to be divulged in order to make sense of the *repetition of the repetitions*, the way in which Scriblerian satire is recursively engaged in its own reproduction. In what follows I will deal with a prominent neoclassical poetic partner in the kind of recursive repetition that animates Scriblerian poetry—Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The Scriblerian appropriation of Ovid contributed significantly to the way in which their writing could gesture toward the possibility of an ethics, while simultaneously deferring the identification of the basis of ethical judgment. The rhetorical force of Scriblerian satire is bolstered by its use of Ovidian metamorphosis, and it is this rhetorical force that brings with it a manifestation of the texts’ concern with the problem of a literary ethics.

The conjunction of energies in Scriblerian satire repeats the energies that were being directed in the preceding generation towards the translation of Ovid, making the conjunction of efforts in the “club” a renewal of the energies of the kinds of collaboration that went into translation in the late seventeenth century. The Scriblerian appropriation of Ovid works on several levels to gather the energies of Ovid towards the purposes of literary writing. And belatedly so—the publication, in 1717, of the successful “coterie”

translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Jacob Tonson (edited by Samuel Garth) marked what was in effect the *end* of an era of Ovid's relevance for English poetics.<sup>1</sup> For centuries perhaps the dominant source for ancient mythological imagery, as well as an important emblem of the way in which pagan mythology could be made to bear Christian moral fruit, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had begun to see its influence wane significantly. Above all, what had begun to seem ill-fitted for the times was the way in which Ovid's long poem had for so long seemed to demand allegorical interpretations. Richard Hardin charts this decline: while "[m]any Englishmen before the Restoration read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* exactly as it had been read in the Middle Ages," the period around the turn of the eighteenth century saw the allegorical mode of reading Ovid fall out of favor.<sup>2</sup> The method of interpreting the myth-laden poem according to a moral economy favorable to Christian authority (known in France as *Ovide moralisé*) had, by the time Dryden translated over 7000 lines of Ovid into English couplets in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, become an unfavorable method of bringing the ancient culture of Augustan

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<sup>1</sup> This translation is, in fact, still in print today, a successful performance of Ovid by our own standards. See Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. trans. John Dryden and others. ed. Sir Samuel Garth. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth's Classics of Literature, 1998. Hereafter cited in the text as "Garth's Ovid."

<sup>2</sup> Hardin notes that "[b]y 1700 cultivated Englishmen had grown weary of reading the *Metamorphoses* with one finger on the learned notes of Mr. Sandys. Accustomed to seeing things in the light of reason, they had no taste for shadowy and inexplicit allegories." Richard F. Hardin. "Ovid in Seventeenth-Century England" *Comparative Literature* 24:1 (1972), 50-1. For an account of the decline of the genre of allegory at the end of the seventeenth century, see Maureen Quilligan. *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), esp. 20ff and 53-58.

Rome into contact with Augustan England.<sup>3</sup> Almost simultaneously, the *Metamorphoses* could apparently no longer be read as allegory, but more broadly, it could in a sense no longer be read *in general*.<sup>4</sup> The Tonson-Garth edition was the last great gasp of a centuries-long literary tradition in which the poem's many tales had been intimately intertwined with religious, literary, and court cultures. Scriblerian writing is, in its gathering and redeployment of Ovid, an echo of this last gasp.

The text of this coterie translation itself was the product of an intergenerational assemblage of translations by a variety of writers who were, as Garth's "Preface" suggests, brought together as much as a monument to the work of Dryden as they were to Ovid, and this span of a generation produces a text that is not completely unified in its attitude toward allegory. The project was a kind of memorial to Dryden's expressed ambition of producing a complete translation of the *Metamorphoses*, and a repetition of the publication of a similar coterie translation of Ovid's *Epistles* to which Dryden contributed as a living translator in 1680. During Dryden's lifetime his translations of

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<sup>3</sup> For Dryden's numbers, see Hardin, 53. For the *Ovide moralisé*, see John Livingston Lowes. "Chaucer and the *Ovide Moralisé*" *PMLA* 33:2 (1918), 302ff. There is a French manuscript of this moralized version of the poem, but the practice in general of recuperating the poem morally was widespread. Sandys' translation (1632) of the *Metamorphoses* summarizes the episodes of the poem using moral allegory in its "Preface."

<sup>4</sup> This occurred in England as well as the European continent—but the latter saw Ovid's popularity remain high until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hardin 57-8). Garth Tissol notes of the Tonson-Garth edition that "[D]uring the period of this translation's eclipse, Ovid's fortunes in general suffered." "Introduction" to *Ovid's Metamorphoses*. trans Dryden et. al. (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1998), xxix.

elements of the *Metamorphoses* were published either in miscellanies or in his *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700), although these were apparently under serious design of republication within the larger project of retranslating the entire poem.<sup>5</sup> Dryden's own tendencies with respect to the allegorical interpretation of the poems are ambivalent. He often expresses a desire to read the poems with an eye toward their use in moral instruction.<sup>6</sup> But the translations he produced remain generally indifferent to allegorization. Tonson and Garth were able to mobilize the work of many young poets, as well as the already-prominent Joseph Addison, to produce a translation that seems to have had as its occasion a dedication to the work of Dryden, and the possibility of giving Dryden's *Ovid* a new life in a new form.<sup>7</sup> The Tonson/Garth translation is not free of

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<sup>5</sup> For a synopsis of the late seventeenth century Tonson/Dryden "team" or "coterie" translations, see Dustin Griffin. "The Social World of Authorship 1660-1714" in John Richetti, ed. *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 41. For Dryden's corpus of Ovidian translations and their publication history, see David Hopkins. "Dryden and the Garth-Tonson *Metamorphoses*" *The Review of English Studies* 153 (1988), 70-72.

<sup>6</sup> In the "Preface to the Fables" he offers extensive rationalization for his choice of translations, and only at the piece's end turns to a moral conclusion: "I have endeavoured to choose such fables, both ancient and modern, as contain in each of them some instructive moral." However, these morals are to remain inarticulate because of the distasteful nature of the task of recounting them. "I could prove [them] by induction, but the way is tedious." "Preface to the Fables" in *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works*. III (London: H. Baldwin and Son, 1800), 596.

<sup>7</sup> Hopkins lists that "[t]he contributors were: Joseph Addison, Alexander Catcott, William Congreve, Samuel

Croxall, John Dryden, Laurence Eusden, Samuel Garth, John Gay, Stephen Harvey, Arthur Maynwaring, John Ozell, Alexander Pope, Nicholas Rowe, Temple Stanyan, William Stonestreet, Nahum Tate, Thomas Vernon, [and] Leonard Welsted" (64n2).

moralization, but its tendency to allegorize or moralize the events of the text is far reduced from editions of the 17<sup>th</sup> century such as Sandys', and Garth's attempts at proving the moral worth of the poem seem at times almost half-hearted.

As a sign of Ovid's waning canonization, Hardin notes that parodies of the poem had begun to appear in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century—the most prominent of these Alexander Radcliffe's often bawdy *Ovid Travestie* (1680) which went through three editions by 1696 (Hardin 52-3). Indeed, Addison also experienced a loss of fervor toward the exiled Roman poet: his "Notes on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" expresses approval for the poem, but refuses to welcome allegorical readings of the text. Hardin recounts that by a 1711 *Spectator* essay, Addison is far more critical of Ovid for what he sees as "mixed wit"—a tendency to promote wit, imagination, and language play for its own sake, without respecting their proper limits (Hardin 54-5). Indeed, Pope, a contributor to the translation project, also rendered it ridiculous in a satirical jab: his light "Sandys' Ghost" (1717) proposes that through Tonson and Garth's amassed translating corps,

to poor Ovid shall befall

A strange metamorphosis.

A metamorphosis more strange

Than all his books can vapour;

"To what (quoth 'squire) shall Ovid change?"

Quoth Sandys: "To waste paper."<sup>8</sup>

But what Pope taketh away with one hand, he giveth with the other: as contributor to Garth's project, Pope also, during this period, was writing his most overtly Ovidian poetry, as well as becoming engaged in the Scriblerus club, which animated itself with Ovidian transformations and energies. But Pope, and, of this translation coterie, John Gay, whose *Fables* would reinvest Aesop with Ovidian and satirical concerns, are the exceptions. The Scriblerians were untimely in what seems to have been their own increasing poetic investment in Ovid and the *Metamorphoses* given the general diminishment of Ovid's importance throughout the century. In what follows, I will attempt to evoke the aesthetic stakes of the Scriblerian taste for Ovid. Using two of Pope's most overtly Ovidian poems, I will begin to show that Ovidian metamorphosis is more than a trope—it is a consistent poetic concern within the writing of Pope and the other Scriblerians. In this moment when Ovidian metamorphosis becomes largely no longer legible as allegory, it transforms for the Scriblerians into an implicit element of poetic methodology that broadly and intensely breathes life into their writing.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope. Vol 6: Minor Poems.* ed. John Butt et al. (London, 1939-67), VI. 174. Cited in Hopkins 65.

Among the many literary clubs that grew out of the coffee-house culture of the emerging “public sphere,” the Scriblerus club was the most intensely bonded to its purposes, and this intensity can be charted in the way the Scriblerian concerns remain central in the satire of its members to the end of their lives. As with the individual works of Pope, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, Harley, and Parnell, the Scriblerians were engaged with neoclassical imitation and translation that found its most powerful conception of repetition in Longinus’ treatise on the sublime. But while it is tempting to understand the Longinian sublimity accessible through translation as the master trope that could represent the “aesthetic” of the Scriblerians, we could ask the question of whether translation could be understood as a figure for *all* literary production, a metaphor too general to offer any discriminatory power. And even within our period, as a figure for phenomena of practice of change, it can be metaphorically extended to so many elements within Scriblerian writing that, like ideology, once we start to look for it, translative figures of transformation could be said to be everywhere. Instead of seeing the ubiquitous presence of translation and associated tropes as a disabling phenomenon, however—one that cheapens or dilutes the figure of translation—we need to consider the way the repetition of these figures work: how, in Clifford Siskin’s terms, “more is

different.”<sup>9</sup> We must ask, in other words, how the repetition of translation works to create a *literature*.

One way to begin to understand this repetition is to note that the generic features that link Scriblerian satire so strongly to translation and imitation are productive of so many publications—so many books, broadsides, and pamphlets. Satire allows for the production, through its devotion to imitative practices, of more publications, the objective textual embodiments of whatever occasions, intentions, ideals, norms, and motivations may have engaged their writers to action. These texts can be understood as instances of the repetitions that help to bring into being a genre, but it is difficult not to feel a bit guilty about the anachronistic definition that makes up such a category. What we think of as a repetition of generic features coalesces for us by way of a narrative *nachtraglichkeit*—a retrospective rendering that allows individual texts to submit to a static figure that nevertheless operates as a placeholder for the dynamic processes, practices, changes, but above all, identities. My concern here is that it is Scriblerian satire in particular that is poorly served by this generic method of reading. To read these texts with a stable understanding of their generic operations would be ignoring the way in which Scriblerian satire identifies its imitative and translative procedures as arising from

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<sup>9</sup> For Siskin’s literary-sociological attention to emergence through repetition, see “More is Different: Literary Change in the Mid- and Late-Eighteenth Century” in John J. Richetti, ed. *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

a radically unique and disjunctive occasion, a *kairos* or powerful moment of transformation in the midst of everyday life.<sup>10</sup> Scriblerian satire proposes, through its repetition of this performance of *kairos*, that each literary production is both thoroughly imitative and yet engaged in the unique qualities of a highly particularized intervention in social life. And these rhetorically empowered occasions are given their life—repeated, and transformed—by the Scriblerian appropriation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

In this chapter, I will turn from my first chapter’s encapsulation of text within the narrative unveiling of a practice of genre to a close reading of several prominent textual examples, in order to allow the texts themselves to speak to us about the occasions of their imitative literary practice. What we will find is that the transformation from individuated intervention to an opening onto process is precisely the type of "translation" with which the Scriblerians' writing concerns itself most, and which it ultimately depicts as a crucial countermeasure to the crisis of modernity. Scriblerian satire is thoroughly invested in renewing or imbuing genre with the intensity of an occasion and in imbuing such occasions with aesthetic and rhetorical life.

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of this Longinian term.

### 3.1. Ovid and Scriblerus<sup>11</sup>

Just as Longinus' treatise preserves an opening to an encounter with/in language by means of performative examples that are also always failures at becoming what we would call a "theory," Ovid's song without end (*carmen perpetuum*) refuses a totalizing conception of what metamorphosis is, or how it works. The *carmen perpetuum* given form as a poetic project by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* is one whose depictions of transformations can be understood to persist or continue infinitely, extending as projections beyond even the boundaries of the text.<sup>12</sup> Despite his affinity for the poet, Dryden thought Ovid went too far in this textual exuberance: "he never knew how to give over when he had done well; but continually varying the same sense an hundred ways, and taking up in another place what he had more than enough inculcated before, he sometimes cloyes his readers, instead of satisfying them."<sup>13</sup> For the Scriblerians, Ovid

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<sup>11</sup> So much credit for my perspective on the Scriblerians' interest in Ovid should be given to Ellen Shearer's massive and cornucopian dissertation of this very title. Shearer's work opens up a multitude of possible avenues for investigation, and her excellent thesis deserves attention. See Ellen Shearer. *Ovid and Scriblerus: An Exploration of Techniques and Themes from the Metamorphoses of Ovid in the Works of Pope, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, and Parnell* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1981)

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Anne Doody observes that within Ovid's poetic movement, "[t]here is no reason for stopping; there never is a boundary quite to any story, as we almost immediately leap over to (or are entangled in) yet another story. We cannot say anything is incomplete, but there seems no stopping point." M.A. Doody. *The Daring Muse*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 86. Hereafter cited in the text as "Doody."

<sup>13</sup> John Dryden. "Preface to the Translation of Ovid's Epistles" (1680) in *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works*. III (London: H. Baldwin and Son, 1800), 11.

represented no such surfeit: Scriblerian satire translates, imitates, refers to, and rewrites Ovidian poetics, heightening the stakes of metamorphic performance by wrapping it tightly in the fabric of social satire. The Scriblerian satirists are engaged in rewriting Ovid, in performing metamorphosis, as a way of arguing that the mode of writing embodied in the "perpetual song" is unsupported by the emerging textual practices of modernity. Perceiving the advance of a particular moment of literary modernity, the Scriblerians perform their Longinian and Ovidian satires elegiacally, as witnesses to that which modernity will make obsolete.

Again and again, what is staged in Scriblerian satire is the moment of Ovidian metamorphosis, brought into the form of satiric and poetic occasion. What we can on one level identify as a Longinian encounter is also, in its orientation toward the sweep of repetition, an Ovidian episode—these features of influence comprise the two basic dimensions of Scriblerian writing. With regard to the temporality of these literary metamorphoses, Mikhail Bakhtin identified the episodic form of repetition as a falling away from the totality represented in the work of Hesiod:

They are metamorphoses only in the narrower sense of the word, changes that are deployed in a series lacking any internal unity. Each such metamorphosis suffices unto itself and constitutes in itself a closed, poetic whole....Time breaks

down into isolated, self-sufficient temporal segments that mechanically arrange themselves into no more than single sequences.<sup>14</sup>

While the move from the totalizing perspective of Hesiod is important for historicizing the *Metamorphoses* in its context, the reinsertion of Ovid's poem into the neoclassicism of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century makes use of its representations of temporality in different ways. The importance of the episodic temporality of the *Metamorphoses* is not that it represents a fall away from an integration of short and long durations in a narrative totality, but that it represents a temporality that seems to self-consciously *resist* a totalizing sweep of chronological perspective that would incorporate episodes into a broadly developmental narrative. Episodes are themselves the objects of aesthetic concern for Pope, Swift, and the other Scriblerians—but it is important to note that it is the *Metamorphoses'* ability to link and proliferate episodes in a non-totalizing manner that the Scriblerians adopt as a crucial element of their aesthetic concerns. In Ovid, the transformation that links without totalizing necessarily takes many forms, and involves many different types of protagonist. There can be no one "type" of metamorphosis. There are various moments of fissure, of encounter between nature, humans, gods, that result in changes that are significant, but significant in an irreducible multiplicity of

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<sup>14</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." in *The Dialogic Imagination*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 114.

ways. In Ovid, these encounters are the climactic features of a varied series of tales, but they also provide an opening to the links between the tales, so that the transformations depicted are not typically end-points. These transformations within plot and action that move the reader along in an unlimited chain of events are also the crucial substance of that plot and action, so that it is not possible to distinguish between episode and transition with any certainty or definition. Perhaps we can attribute this to the philosophy invoked by the speech of Pythagoras near the poem's end, a Heraclitean doctrine of flux, transmigration, and metempsychosis that proposes a world of never-ending change.<sup>15</sup> But the poem does not allow even this to serve as a climax, treating this doctrinal revelation as just one narrative event, one moment that results in change. Neither Ovid nor the Scriblerians are willing to promote a simple doctrine of flux to a supreme place as the philosophical *raison-d'etre* or truth of poetics.

I will argue that the Scriblerians are deeply concerned to allow transformative encounters to take place in an Ovidian manner, in which episodes of change are themselves either related as transitional tales that refuse to coalesce into a unifying textual goal, or become caught within the satiric operations in which an ostensibly limited and coherent topic (such as Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, his *Essays on Man* and

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<sup>15</sup> For the ironic and satirical elements of Ovid's treatment of Pythagoras that also enable us to refuse his presence in the poem an encapsulating or totalizing effect, see John F. Miller. "The Memories of Ovid's Pythagoras." *Mnemosyne* XLVII Facs. 4 (1994), 473-487.

*Criticism*, or Swift's "A Modest Proposal") is metamorphosed beyond the containment of topic, performing both the ridiculousness of the dogmatic belief in the coherence of a broad theorization of the subject at hand, and the impossibility of taking this very ridicule to be the truth of the matter.<sup>16</sup> Ovidian Metamorphosis is performed in these works as the antithesis to all dogmatic relations to language, producing a sense of shifting groundlessness, a world of experience that seeks to postpone truth, something like what James Noggle has aptly called the "Skeptical Sublime."<sup>17</sup>

Through this logic, a summary statement of the radically unsettling power of metamorphosis for Scriblerian satire is, then, not enough—its particular interventions have to be engaged. If, in other words, we are to avoid the same kind of metaphysics of truth and certainty that the Scriblerians refuse, we cannot simply propose that

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<sup>16</sup> Max Byrd defends an attention to metamorphosis in early-C18 satire by admitting that "The subject of universal change is universal" but adding that "what distinguishes Augustan variations on the theme is the tension produced by placing the idea of uncontrollable, irrational change in the context of specific systems of order." I will focus on this specificity here, and argue that, for these writers, "tension" is not the only affective product of being caught in flux. See "Pope and Metamorphosis: Three Notes." *Modern Philology* 85: 4 (May, 1988), 447.

<sup>17</sup> See Noggle, *The Skeptical Sublime*. Margaret Anne Doody (*ibid*) also proposes that metamorphoses, for the "Augustans," are produced for their own sake, or for the sake of a program that exceeds the moralistic:

In Augustan poetry we frequently watch vivid changes from state to state in which neither condition can be seen as preferable. Sometimes (but relatively rarely), alteration is decidedly for the better. More frequently it is in some sense for the worse. But the observation of changes can often mean watching protean change for its own sake, seeing a process which has energies in motion rather than upward (or even downward) progression (150).

Scriblerians are proponents of a skeptical sublime that stops just short of nihilism, and consider that to be the fact of the matter. Scriblerian writings all concern themselves with particular instances in which language is engaged in ways that are stifling, restrictive, or metaphysically assertive. The performance of "satire" when it occurs is the performance of an encounter with these relations with language that attempt what Jonathan Lamb, in discussing the Socratic and Hegelian dialectics, calls "the practice of mastery."<sup>18</sup> Scriblerian satire is a performance, in difference, or indifference, to as many ultimate determinations as it can fend off, and indeed it seeks to make the reduction of language to a masterful utility impossible through performance—to perform that impossibility. This is what separates the Scriblerians from the Whig satirists of their time such as Garth, Addison and Steele—the figure of social reform is held up by the Whig satirists as the useful purpose of satire. For the Scriblerians, this progressive sensibility is a deadening prospect for language, contributing as much to the encroaching Dulness which in the 1743 *Dunciad*—the Scriblerians' final literary statement—apocalyptically transforms all of reality in its own image.

This distinction is the crucial one: to understand the role that metamorphosis plays in Scriblerian satire, we have to consider how even "allies" like Garth are depicted, in the *Dunciad*, as contributing to the reign of Dulness. The progressive model of reform

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<sup>18</sup> See Lamb's excellent "Longinus, the Dialectic, and the Practice of Mastery." *ELH* 60, no. 3 (1993), 545-567.

and of the utility of cultural education provided by Addison and Steele's Spectator is ultimately not acceptable to the Scriblerians. The models of temporality and self that validate reformist satire presume a dogmatic assertion of cultural content, the structure of identity, and a notion of progressive mastery with regard to language. In the face of these possibilities, Scriblerian satire performs multiple temporalities, refusing to participate fully in the progression of narrative or the accumulation of historicism. The Scriblerians cite, rewrite, and transform Ovidian metamorphoses into engagements with what they depict as a difficult modernity that threatens the very possibility of satire, of the transporting encounter depicted by the Longinian *hypsous*, and of difference in its most unsettling senses. Scriblerian satire stages all of this concern at the site at which humans produce language, which is to say, the scenes of reading and writing. The definitive dedicated Scriblerian act is the performance of a satire that refuses what it sees as the modern version of the possibilities for writing, and performs an entirely different alternative, linguistic encounter in proliferating series that allow the conjunction of subject and language to be experienced in flux, in the act of metamorphosis, and indeed, as metamorphosis itself. These encounters must always be renewed, restless performances of a complete entanglement between subject and language that seek to hold at bay what Michael McKeon in *The Secret History of Domesticity* labels as the great process of historical modernity—an "explicitation" or process of revelation that cumulatively, dialectically, encounters entanglements and metamorphic flux and

hypostatizes them into a form which exposes both language and subjects to a Geist-like will to epistemology.

These assertions aside, it still remains to show how, among a host of classical influences and schemes of reference, Ovid might be isolated as something like a privileged influence. . . Pope's Homer was certainly of major significance among the period's translations of classical work; the satires of Horace and Juvenal are clearly of well-analyzed influence; and the imitations of Virgil produced by so many Augustan writers clearly indicate that Virgilian poetics was the site of a large share of imitative desire during the period. But alongside these unassailable genealogical observations, the presence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is, like the literary treatise by Longinus, one of methodology as much as it is one of reference. And while Dryden had produced significant portions of Ovid translations late in his career, the Scriblerians feature a set of poetic concerns that match those of Ovid in *distinction* from those of Virgil and Homer. While Virgil and Homer are hardly antithetical to Scriblerian writing,<sup>19</sup> Ovid offers a commentary and revision of the epic that the Scriblerians reproduce in their satire. Indeed, Scriblerian satire can be said to be as predominantly *Ovidian* as it is Menippean, Juvenalian, or Horatian.

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<sup>19</sup> And indeed, Laura Brown, in *Fables of Modernity*, sees Virgil as the emblematic figure for the generic mode by which Augustan literature addresses the modern. See Brown. *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2001)

The poetry of Ovid was in its own way a staging of imitative practice, and Ovid's near contemporary Virgil was the concern of much of his successor's revision of prior models. Ovid's text has been classified in various different conjunctions with the epic, but above all else it produces a radically multiple set of ironies directed at the Virgilian epic form that both pay homage to and largely unsettle the features of the genre. Genre in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is tied to epic concerns, but wanders along the length of that tether to such an extent that generic labels become difficult. Joseph B. Solodow observes that through the "playfulness" the poem directs toward its models, it "is comprehensive ... not only of time and subject, but also of literary genres, and this too becomes a principle of organization."<sup>20</sup> As an imitation of Virgil, the *Metamorphoses* is concerned with the language of its predecessors as well—the methods of etymological "play" that help to shape Ovid's poem are complex and integral to its structure. J.J. O'Hara's analysis of the importance of Ovid's linguistic treatment of Virgil asserts that a proliferation of puns, explicit development of only-implicit Virgilian references, and a constant etymological attention to Greek origin of Latin words provide the *Metamorphoses* with a shifting linguistic methodology that parallels its treatment of

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<sup>20</sup> Solodow, Joseph B. *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 1988), 25.

genre.<sup>21</sup> The practice of poetics in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is, we might say, itself a poetics of transformation, metamorphosis, or, to extend our previous discussion, translation.

If we are to identify Ovidian metamorphosis with translation, however, we must make explicit that any translative practice represented within the poem's method or its content is performed as provisional, as a never completed moment and never satisfactory method in the sweep of a poem that asserts that its processes, its narrations and repetitions, continue beyond its own boundaries. Ovid's repetition and revision of Virgil can be literally said to be quite concerned with translation. But the notion of translation that emerges from the *Metamorphoses* is one in which further translation is always proposed, a staging of translative movements that will not allow themselves to be encapsulated within a dominant and authoritative textual arc.

In what follows I will examine several examples of the ways in which the writings of the Scriblerians cite, revise, translate, and take on the methods and tropes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Keeping in mind the discussion of the Scriblerians' fundamentally translative poetics from Chapter 1, I will propose that the concern with metamorphic

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<sup>21</sup> See O'Hara, J. J. "Vergil's Best Reader? Ovidian Commentary on Vergilian Etymological Wordplay." *The Classical Journal* 91.3 (1996): 255-276. Margaret Anne Doody also notes "Ovid's own inventiveness, as well as his own parodic sense of style and genre" (89). Contrast with this the Horace of Doody's *The Daring Muse*, whose *Sermones* (conversations, now "satires") are the very opposite of imitative (or parodic) poetry—each is (it claims) its own poem, free of determination from tradition's influence. Doody depicts quite powerfully the way that Horace's satires were self-consciously and intensely parodic commentaries on past models and generic norms masquerading as independent and self-aggrandizing autonomous creations (Doody 93).

textuality is an extension and a development of the very same concerns that brought Longinian *hypsous*, theoretical concern about translation, and the generic features of imitation to prominence in Scriblerian satire. In making this association, I will propose that when these elements are considered in conjunction, the features of what we would today call *virtuality* that (most overtly, in the person of Martin Scriblerus, author) provide the very genesis of the Scriblerian project become more apparently the major aesthetic concern of the writings of the group as a whole. A virtual reality emerges from the repetitive production of textual difference in Scriblerian writing. To be sure, the term “virtual” does not need to stand out here as an anachronism: several definitions of “virtual” were operative at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The most prominent of these was, as the *OED* defines it, a depiction of a quality “[t]hat is so in essence or effect, although not formally or actually; admitting of being called by the name so far as the effect or result is concerned.”<sup>22</sup> In optics, the adjective “virtual” defined the implied or projected site at which light rays would apparently converge, a “virtual focus.” The notion in general carried, in this moment, the conception of a feature that emerges *a*

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<sup>22</sup> See “Virtual” *Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition* 1989. Oxford University Press. Accessed 4.22.08. URL: <[http://proxy.lib.duke.edu:2100/cgi/entry/50278111?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=virtual&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://proxy.lib.duke.edu:2100/cgi/entry/50278111?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=virtual&first=1&max_to_show=10)>

*posteriori* as an effect that forces a reconsideration of the essence of the phenomenon in question, or that forces a reconsideration of essential definition *only in terms of effect*.

Michael McKeon makes persistent use of the terms “virtual,” “virtualizing,” “virtualization” in *The Secret History of Domesticity*, suggesting that the emergence of practices that became known as “public” were ways in which culture became possible in detachment from bodies and particularized places. It is in the sense of movement away from a readily identifiable causal conjunction of forces to an (often disembodied and deterritorialized) effect that I use the term here. Behind the production of virtuality becomes the very essence of the poetic project that positions itself in opposition to the “modern,” and the poetic and linguistic features of the emerging modern modes of writing. This virtuality takes shape in the authorial relation to the text (persona and “death” of the author), the commitment to the production of emergent, rather than narrated, differences, and a deep concern with the temporality of modern poetics, for which, in the view of the Scriblerians, intensification, occasion, and hiatus have become displaced as experiential possibilities. Above all, however, the commitment of virtuality at the heart of the Scriblerian friendship is a commitment to a theory of difference that understands intensity and affect as irreplaceable elements of an encounter within language, and the hypostatizing features of a modern poetics of identity, historicism, and dialectic as the echoes of the death knell of the possibility of such an encounter. Ovidian metamorphosis allows the Scriblerians to enact a poetics of virtuality that

embodies a countermodernity, even as the metamorphosis to modernity is the very subject matter of much of their writing. To examine some of these claims, I will turn now to a reading of Pope's "Windsor-Forest" that engages with its Ovidian and Longinian concerns. "Windsor-Forest," seen in the light of an attention to these aesthetic concerns, opens up a more thorough perspective on the aesthetics of the virtual that I have proposed here. We will see, through a reading of Aristotle's *Poetics* attentive to its differences from Ovidian aesthetics, and finally through a look at Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, that the Scriblerian aesthetic (here emblemized by Pope) is ultimately concerned with the positive possibilities of modern virtuality, and with depicting the way that what it figures as the instrumentalizing forces of that modernity disable or colonize the very virtual realm that they help to make possible.

### **3.2. *Windsor-Forest: Scriblerian Ovid before Scriblerus***

Scriblerian writing—even in its earliest and most conservative of forms—is deeply concerned about what it represents as an oncoming process of dialectical social realism, one that makes possible the very discipline of history as it emerges from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even a poem such as Pope's "Windsor-Forest," (1704 and 1712) which is often read as a historicist, nationalist, and nostalgically conservative poem in the tradition of "great house" poetry, reveals itself to be deeply anxious about this

reduction, and concerned to fend it off.<sup>23</sup> As a celebration of the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht to end the War of the Spanish Succession, the poem is itself proleptic in its representation of peace—the Treaty would not be signed until the year following Pope's final revision of the poem.<sup>24</sup> And peace is represented as the great *concordia discors* of the forest landscape, where, to quote the poem "Order in Variety we see, / and where, tho' all things differ, all agree" (15-16).<sup>25</sup> But what is the unity that inscribes this multiplicity within its bounds? This question haunts the attentive reader, who is faced with ceaseless frustration in the attempt to come to rest on a clearly unifying identity with which the poem encapsulates the multiplicity that Pope assures us is not antithetical to order. The poem identifies the violence of the most overtly unifying process at work on the landscape, which is to say, enclosure, as part of a great Ovidian sweep of decline and decay that followed some original worldly inception and Golden Age. The reign of a Stuart queen is praised as that which will enable the reflorescence of nature's bounty,

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<sup>23</sup> Max Byrd notes that "the fact of sheer Ovidian metamorphosis—the literal transformation of one thing into another, like lock into star—seems to have exerted a pull on Pope's imagination from the very earliest poems" (452). Here I attempt to provide an example of the aesthetic concerns that require this Ovidian presence.

<sup>24</sup> The treaty was signed on 31 March 1713. See Aitken, George Atherton. *The Life and Works of John Arbuthnot* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 53 n1.

<sup>25</sup> All citations from Pope's poetry are taken from *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A Reduced Version of the Twickenham Text*. Ed. John Butt (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1963).

resulting in the drastic shift back from this state of violence and decay to a golden age of peace and prosperity once more. "Stuart" acquires no deep content here, as much as it is merely a proper name that will serve as an act of signature (in the future Treaty) and thereby, in enacting this signature, put an end to centuries of decomposition and violence—a sublime speech act of performative writing. What is more, the new Golden Age is depicted as presided over by Anne's sublime statement "Let Discord cease! / She said, the World obey'd, and all was Peace!," a linguistic act that repeats what Longinus identifies as the ultimate in performative sublimity—the statement "Let there be light" from the Hebrew scriptures which embodies a divine performance of linguistic intensity and power. But several important elements of this peace, and of this performative utterance, relegate the results to a less-than-certain outcome, and abandon the products of the performance itself to the figure of an Ovidian metamorphosis that enacts a momentary encounter, a change bridging the path to other changes, but which cannot accept a place as the sovereign event. Great Anna is truly sublime in bringing about this imagined future of peace, but the elements that make up the newly peaceful realm fail to passively become part of an order (where "all agree") under the explanatory powers of this moment of royal fiat. The poem expresses great concern to prevent the image of this great Stuart triumph from becoming something that can be fetishized as a dogmatic political statement, without undermining the sublimity this moment nevertheless expresses and performs. Ovidian metamorphoses are enlisted to articulate this concern.

It is important to note that "Windsor-Forest" is a thoroughly Ovidian poem. It stages revisions or recombinations of a number of metamorphoses—and indeed, in reading for Ovidian tropes, metamorphosis comes to define nearly every couplet, every poetic statement. Its quasi-historical account of British decadence, for example, whose notion of historical change refuses any consistent notion of causality except that of the self-perpetuating transformative power of violence. Or the poem's various depictions of the hunt as the sublimated form of violence within an ostensible national concord, or its representation of sylvan retirement from political life that, in an echo of Juvenal's third satire, stages a metamorphosis that seems more like the transmigration of a soul into a new body, so different is the personal engagement in each of the respective worlds. The violence depicted as persisting within the "peace" through the at once innocent and thoroughly execrable sport of hunting is perhaps most striking. Here the now-licensed release of masculine vitality and restlessness finds a way through an awkward simile to compare itself to the violence of imperial confrontation and colonization. The spaniel, agent of the huntsman, surveils the resting place of the partridge, and

Couch'd close he lyes, and meditates the Prey;

Secure they trust th'unfaithful Field, beset,

Till hov'ring o'er 'em sweeps the swelling Net.

Thus (if small Things we may with great compare)

When Albion sends her eager Sons to War,

Some thoughtless Town, with Ease and Plenty blest,  
Near, and more near, the closing Lines invest;  
Sudden they seize th'amaz'd, defenceless Prize,  
And high in Air Britannia's Standard flies.

(102-110)

What is at first an expression of the recreational release made possible by national self-sufficiency becomes in a jarring moment of metamorphosis a violent confrontation with otherness that seeks to overcome this otherness, negate it, imperially assimilate it, in the name of a national identity. The poem's apparent need to compare the violence of the peace to the state of overt war is an indication that the conceptualization of the new, domestic and leisurely peace is impossible without the conception of an externalized and expanding colonial violence. It is hardly a perfectly pastoral *concordia*. Here, nature is the site of conflict in which it is to some measure ultimately captured and subdued. But the metaphoric shift is here one in which the domestic subjugation of nature requires a gesture to the ongoing practice (via the abstract "when" that begins the comparison) of the capture of towns and territories as acts of war. An enclosed natural, domesticated setting of small game hunting cannot be thought without a conception of an ongoing violence between peoples—the comparison

leaps the boundaries of the domestic enclosure and looks to other places and times in order to understand the violence of England's peace.

Nature is depicted throughout the poem as a kind of backdrop or stage for human interactions, sometimes victimized by humanity, and sometimes able to take a measure of revenge, as is common in Ovid's poem. But nature is also an active agent whose own behavior is caught up in human change. The scene depicting Lodona, one of Diana's nymphs, who, residing chastely in Windsor Forest, is desired by the god Pan, is an example of an Ovidian moment that enacts a desperate desire to ward off the approaching act of violence, which is in this case sexual—a rape.<sup>26</sup> The intensity of the prospect of rape sets the stage for a powerful transformative moment—here, in Pope's poem, as in Ovid. The conjunction of temporalities, and Lodona's (and the poem's) desperate desire to escape being captured by that acquisitive and self-interested desire embodied by Pan, create a scene in which Lodona's great transformation, in which through a prayer to Cynthia she is dissolved into a silver stream of water and allowed to flow away, makes much more anxious both Anne's great pronouncement of peace and the section of nationalist pride that ends the poem, spoken by the figure of the god

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Anne Doody asserts that "we are meant to see through" this Ovidian scene in Pope's poem—"we are meant to spot...[it] as smooth contrivance, a flourish of ornament" (Doody 86). There is no doubt that the imitative reference to Ovid carries some of the disrespect of parody. But the structure of this scene is crucial to those that follow, and its intensities are worthy of consideration beyond the near dismissal that Doody offers. For a discussion of this scene, and more on sexual violence, see my Chapter 4 for further Scriblerian and Augustan treatment of the theme of rape.

Thames. As performative utterances, the two statements (Lodona's prayer and Anne's proclamation) mirror each other in their transformative effects. This mirroring adds an unusual intensity to Anne's transformative proclamation. If her "Let Discord cease!" mirrors Lodona's desperate act and is performed to ward off some pursuing or arriving fate that would parallel the rape intended by Pan, then it becomes not only an elemental change that transforms individual or national identity into the flux or flow of peace, but also one enacted not as a confident and deifying performative, but as a prayer to hold off the encroaching rule of violence, a last ditch effort in which Anne must give up her body, too, a sacrificial transformation into a river. For as Anne speaks, she awakens Father Thames, who takes over the role of the speaking voice of Britannia, to ostensibly represent the new realm of peace that Anne's pronouncement has brought into being. Anne in essence *becomes* the Thames, a transformation that illustrates the new dominance of mercantilism and imperial trade within national political identity. The Stuart Queen makes peace possible by giving way to a massive mobilization of trade.

But this river god to whom Anne gives way after her transformative line makes even more uncertain the possibility that the great Stuart peace will be a true hiatus from the endless cycle of transformation, degeneration, and violence that threaten to become all-encompassing. Old Father Thames is at first a sympathetic proponent of the transformation of All into River. But after a long dramatic monologue in which British trade is proposed by the river as the basis for a return to a Golden Age, the river's

proposal of an end of time in the flood of British commerce is accompanied by an unsettling expression of self-interest and aggrandizement.<sup>27</sup> The river wants to be the one who emerges intact and sovereign from this translation of everything into its watery flow.

The Time shall come, when free as Seas or Wind

Unbounded Thames shall flow for all Mankind,

(397-8)

The river god advertises this as an end to violence and imperialism, an end to the very need for transformation, the banishment from the world of all oppositional encounters with an other. But the speaker of the poem refuses to identify with the river here, allowing him to reveal his watery plan, but refusing to allow this image of future to end the poem. The river is not consigned to critique by the figure of the poet—the poet seems to agree strongly with the desire for an end to violence, slavery, conquest,

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<sup>27</sup> Douglas Brooks-Davies recounts the readings that have emphasized the biblical parallels between Thames' prophecy and Isaiah's, which Pope had imitated in his 1712 *Messiah*. "The Twickenham editors note that Thames constantly echoes Isaiah 60 in order to dramatize himself into a vehicle of visionary truth." See "'Thoughts of Gods': Messianic Alchemy in 'Windsor-Forest'" *The Yearbook of English Studies* 18 (1988), 127ff. Here, Brooks-Davies' depiction of this parallel suggests, in line with my own reading, a self-aggrandizement on the part of the would-be prophet that undercuts the patriotic reading of the poem. Brooks-Davies usefully ties this prophetic messianism to the messianic rhetoric of Jacobitism. What Brooks-Davies identifies as "alchemical" I propose falls under the more generally Ovidian concerns of the poem.

and colonialism. But in distinction from the voice of the invoked muse, and the voice of the self-aggrandizing river, the poet remarks that his

humble Muse, in unambitious Strains,  
Paints the green Forests and the flow'ry Plains  
...  
Even I more sweetly pass my careless Days,  
Pleas'd in the silent Shade with empty Praise;

(427-432)

In the final pastoral image, the poet refuses to allow that these grand visions of the forest's deities or the prophetic future of the nation are the act in which he is primarily engaged. Even in "Windsor-Forest," which Pope began when he was 16 and finished two years before the beginning of his Scriblerian friendships, he displays a concern to make use of metamorphosis to create a thoroughly unsettled and unsettling relationship to future—a future in which no transformation will provide either a certain history or the certain end of that history, and where no sovereign utterance can stand as much more than an intervention into its moment, and an invitation to further transformation. Already concerned to perform what would later preoccupy the Scriblerian writers, Pope here is deeply ambivalent about progressive narrative, and rigidified national or personal identity. In the performance of this ambivalence emerges

not a nostalgia for a past or more essential present identity (which is how the poem is more often read), but a gesture towards something other, something that would qualify as a poetic act that would be faithful to metamorphosis, even as it finds itself pursued by or awaiting a future in which it will be subsumed by the defining force of literary history.

### **3.3. *Metamorphic Imitation: an Anti-Aristotelian Aesthetics***

“Windsor-Forest” is imitative of many poetic forms—from the Virgilian georgic and pastoral to the patriotic poetry of Denham and Marvell. Imitation occurs, in other words, as an act of performance of varying generic modes and norms, varying authorial personae, and direct citation of prior poetic moments. The imitative elements of Pope’s *Windsor Forest* cannot be separated from their status as prior literary performances: the poem is “about” the forest itself only in the sense that the forest is mobilized as a figure of *occasion* from which the poem’s ruminations emerge. This is not the same as the locodescriptive poetry of early Romanticism. Its emphasis on the forest as an experienced occasion allows the poet and the reader to move beyond the forest itself into a series of citational and mythological performances that refuse the more individual and psychological relations to landscape that will come with later poetry. The mode of imitation performed thus in this poetic landscape is one that operates by way of a series of transformations, exchanges that ultimately return us to the personal awareness of the

figure of the poet with which we began. The development of this narrative (if we can call it narrative) is loosely one of *crescendo*, with the poem's intensity apparently reaching its height of sublimity in Father Thames' scene. But it is an uneasy *crescendo* whose progression is not a *bildung*, not an emergence of coherent identity. As I have tried to illustrate by way of my reading, above, I argue that Scriblerian satire is particularly attentive to the question of *plot*, at times internalizing the repetitive and cyclical modes of narrative of Ovid and the tradition of the tale that followed from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. At other times, Scriblerian satire sheds the template of repetitive narrative plateaus for an apocalyptic developmental form—this is to a limited extent the form of *Windsor Forest*, and later, Pope's *The Dunciad*.

I will argue that these two modes of narration are the product of the larger aesthetic concerns of the satirists, concerns about developments in poetic and narrative form that exchange both the repetition of encounter and the grand intensity of emergent apocalypse for a new moral certitude that can reside within the new fully psychological individual of the novel. Rather than the repetitions of the Ovidian tale, the writers who were opposed and satirized by the Scriblerians were engaged with producing writing that could associate the self with certain moral knowledge. The skepticism of the Scriblerians (depicted by James Noggle, Rose Zimbardo, among others) takes aesthetic form here, in their unwillingness to admit the possibility of a combination of narrative, stable character, and coherent moral knowledge. The Scriblerians in essence choose the

tradition of the Ovidian tale as a countermeasure to the more Aristotelian mode embodied by writers as varied as Addison, Defoe, Blackmore, Young, and others. Scriblerian satire is a performance of a poetic alternative to the revelation of self and moral certitude becoming more and more common in other satire, essays, narrative poetry, and the emerging novel.

It is Aristotelian aesthetic theory that provides the most palpable route to the forms of narrative development that concern the Scriblerians. To be sure, Aristotle has a long history within English letters, and does not come unmediated to writers and critics in the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century. Indeed, John W. Draper noted long ago that throughout the century, “[t]he *Poetics* were much revered, but little read,” which is to say, they were received at second hand through a tradition of their interpretation.<sup>28</sup> Shakespeare’s growing fame as writer whose formal tendencies were described as following “nature” rather than the rules of art was a sign that more prescriptive classical doctrines of poetic form had begun to fade in importance, perhaps in large part because of the influence of Longinus’ sublime.<sup>29</sup> The notion that Shakespeare or, as Longinus offers, Homer, could represent nature is an indication of a shift away from the largely scholastic poetics of the

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<sup>28</sup> John W. Draper. “Aristotelian Mimesis in Eighteenth Century England.” *PMLA* 36:3 (1921), 374.

<sup>29</sup> See, of course, Pope’s preface to his *Shakespeare* in . *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope. Vol. II, The Major Works, 1725-1744*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. 13ff.

16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (in which models were to be closely followed) to a mode of imitation that held a more ambivalent relation to the notion of model.<sup>30</sup> But the second-hand versions of Aristotle that made their way into critical concern were of undeniable importance. Terence Cave recounts that similar conditions existed in France, where “no reliable French translation of the *Poetics* or systematic vernacular commentary was available until Dacier’s appeared in 1692.”<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, writers such as Corneille and Racine were embroiled in significant debate over the concepts of the *Poetics* based on their use of Italian or Latin editions. Dacier’s French edition made the treatise more widely available to an English audience as well, and it was itself translated into English (mirroring the translations into English of Boileau’s translation of Longinus) in 1705 (Cave 116n1). To a large extent, the changes from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the Romantic period with regard to imitation can be said to revolve around shifts in interpretation of the notion of *mimesis* as it emerges from Aristotle’s *Poetics*. The Scriblerians represent one moment in this broader consideration of *mimesis*, although it is a moment that finds itself amenable to skepticism in ways that earlier and later notions of mimetic poetics do not. Pope, in the *Essay on Criticism*, situates Aristotle at the head of the tribe of critics—closest

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<sup>30</sup> Draper’s article charts the shift in notions of imitation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, observing that models were gradually abandoned in favor of gestures toward experience or nature (i.e. non-textual occasions). See Draper 386-9.

<sup>31</sup> Terence Cave. *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 116.

to nature, but nevertheless secondary to Homer. For Pope, however innocent Aristotle's depiction of Homer may be in itself, criticism as it springs from "[t]he mighty Stagirite" is an act of writing innately inclined toward dullness.<sup>32</sup> I will examine the *Poetics* briefly here to show how the Aristotelian form of imitation, and the notion of recognition (*anagnorisis*) at the heart of the Aristotelian tragic plot, are antithetical to the Scriblerian aesthetics of autopoietic virtuality, repetitive imitation, and occasion—how, in fact, these features of criticism as they emerge from Aristotle contribute to the dullness abhorred by the Scriblerians. These features of Aristotle's *Poetics* are precisely those that ultimately outlast the Scriblerians' opposition to them by taking new form in the novel and, later, in Romantic poetry.

Aristotle's treatise is motivated by the very need to give a name to the art of imitation in language. The *Poetics* operates as a prescriptive outline of the proper construction of tragedy and epic, the two imitative poetic forms that Aristotle values highly enough to include in the treatise. Poetic imitation, when it is performed properly, focuses itself on a reproduction of "action," in distinction from "character" or "thought." On the surface this might seem friendly to the later, Longinian aesthetic and its rendition of all writing as performance. I will return to this question below. But it is important to clarify what counts as action: here, it is a temporal abstraction that emerges from a

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<sup>32</sup> Pope. *An Essay on Criticism*, 645.

poem's (or any literary) depiction of verbal relation within and along the strands of its web of nouns. Aristotle establishes a strict division between noun entities such as character and thought and the verbal abstraction of action. The treatise proposes that nouns are utterly untemporal in isolation, that they are assemblages of phonemes that depict a particular embodiment of stasis within the world. Simple noun forms ("goat," for instance) do not even carry "significance," which can only emerge as the noun becomes activated within a combination—either with another noun or a verb.<sup>33</sup> "Goatherd" (to pick an arbitrary example) then, produces a relationship of signification for both of its simple nouns, adding significance that did not exist in the simple form. This significance is not temporal, however—given that this compound form is not given action, it cannot express any temporal relationship. Despite the fact that the verbal noun "herd" is a metaphor that hypostatizes an active duty into a profession or identity, the temporality is leeched away by the transformation from verb to noun. Nouns depict only abstraction within stasis, only the accreted meaning that has come to rest in a form that is generally stable and independent of action for its existence. Nouns, on their own, are outside of the experience of time, and as such, cannot provide the basis for imitation

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<sup>33</sup> "A Noun is a composite significant sound, not marking time, of which no part is in itself significant: for in double or compound words we do not employ the separate parts as if each were in itself significant." *The Poetics of Aristotle*. ed. and with critical notes and translation by S.H. Butcher (London: Macmillan, 1907), 75. Hereafter cited in the text.

in poetry. Poetic plot cannot emerge from consideration of a static abstraction. Here emerges a crucial difference from Longinus, for whom nouns themselves, including the proper names of writers, succumb to the temporalizing flux of performance.<sup>34</sup>

If imitation, for Aristotle, is unable to enfold concrete abstractions into its work, then it must depict the transitions, relationships, intensifications, and other interactive events that emerge from a world in constant motion. Within this conception of poetic imitation, Aristotle points to the elusive original of change within the world outside of text as the only proper model. In this way imitation can retain its lively relation to learning: “the instinct of imitation” is an innate and apparently pre-linguistic human quality that deeply links learning to pleasure, promoting one kind of repetition of imitation as a process of the accumulation of knowledge. In this way, Aristotle depicts an instinctual imitative behavior that is both repetitive and cumulative, although he does not dwell on the faculty (presumably memory) that allows learning to result in *knowledge*, an abstraction that implies not only accumulation but abstraction and hypostatization in its own right. Nevertheless, Aristotle asserts that knowledge and imitation are closely tied in the human mind.

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<sup>34</sup> While Paul Ricoeur argues that, in Greek literary criticism and the *Poetics* in particular, “[t]he *-sis* ending common to *poiesis* and *sustasis* as well as *mimesis* underlines the process-character of each of these terms,” this point comes for Ricoeur as a corrective to the way in which translations of the text fail to appreciate what he proposes to be the sense of process and action implied by the terms. My proposal here is that on one level, within poetics, Aristotle does indeed evacuate temporal process from noun forms. See Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative, Volume 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 237 n5.

All Aristotelian poetry therefore imitates action, or that temporal element of life that cannot be isolated in noun-abstraction. Still, the modes of tragedy, epic, and comedy have to choose carefully which objects they include within their plots in order to preserve the propriety of their forms. Character is vital because in the high or low character inheres a capacity for different range of action. Thought is vital—as the presence, within a poem, of the speech of characters, it represents a rhetorical parallel to the action of the poem, a second-order stage on which a virtual drama may (if the poet is skillful) take place. But thought cannot replace action, which does not occur within the essentially static realm of rhetoric. Aristotelian imitation of action is thoroughly mimetic, and asserts the occurrence of *events* as thoroughly vigorous eruptions that allow the temporal to break into human life. The plot allows its virtual agents to repeat such an event, and as such, sets characters and thoughts in motion from stasis to eruption to *denouement*. The true topic of poetry is the eruption of temporality into human experience of the world. In this sense, it could be said that all poetry attuned to and influenced by the Aristotelian definition is poetry of occasion. We will see, however, that Ovidian poetics offers a modification of Aristotle's imitation that further refines the notion of occasion, and critiques the notions of temporality developed in the *Poetics*.

Even pushed to this limit of explanation, even if care is taken to remain faithful to Aristotle's concerns about the absolute difference between verbs and nouns, this concept of action is difficult to describe without excessive use of static abstractions that

*translate* an exceptional experience of temporality into the *status quo* of character, nouns, or concepts. To make things more difficult, however, Aristotle asserts that within tragedy (and, indeed, all truly poetic forms), the cumulative experience of the pleasure of learning that promotes imitation is also at the heart of the organization of mimetic plots. The two crucial structuring elements of plot (prior to *denouement* or “unraveling”) are *Peripeteia* and *Anagnorisis* (recognition), the first of which requires a movement from a baseline estimation of the truth of the situation into a recognizable opposite, while the second implies that what had occurred as inchoate activity has at last been translated into epistemological stability—through the plot, a piece of the world turns out to become available to knowledge. We are carried there (where there is no “there”—the whirlwind of pure temporal eruption) and back again, a journey through the sublime that serves to reassert our knowledge of our own identities with the value-added inclusion of a tragic moral lesson. The very completion that Aristotle requires of action indicates that whatever hiatus it may represent from stasis, it must return to the state in which a whole is again available—an epistemologically static whole that includes, at the end, what had at first seemed to be irreducible action. Aristotle’s analysis of tragic and epic plot is a close precursor to the subjective economy of the Kantian sublime.

This is not to say that the unknowable or ineffable does not exist in the Aristotelian poetics. Rather, where Aristotle differs from Longinus and from Ovid in terms of the epistemological basis for poetics is the way in which he seems to wish to

banish the unknowable to a realm *outside* and *unavailable* to poetry. Poetry that fails to recoup its indulgence in the mysteries of temporality threatens both its own ability to function as poetry, and poetic production itself, which depends on a consistent set of expectations such as that described in the treatise in order to function productively for its participants. If there is one abstraction that Aristotle seems to offer that might remain unassimilated to poetic form, it is the “Tragic Incident,” which “is a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds and the like.” But this, too, is then defined in its relation to the knowledge of the characters who are involved in the incident—whether it occurs “with knowledge of the persons,” “done in ignorance,” “to be about to act with knowledge of the persons and then not to act,” or “when some one is about to do an irreparable deed through ignorance, and makes the discovery before it is done” (51). All modes of tragic incident, that ostensibly material and bodily feature of the eruption of the tragic event, function in accordance with their incorporation in the body of knowledge that becomes available through the plot.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Aristotle identifies the third of the types of tragic action—“to be about to act knowing the persons and then not to act” as the “worst” type— “[i]t is shocking without being tragic, for no disaster follows.” The frustration of a potentially emergent yoking of disaster to knowledge threatens the plot’s commitment to rendering a tragic action intelligible. Aristotle seems to claim that this failure threatens action as such, since something here fails to occur, rendering the plot static. But what allows the perception of failure— knowledge, experienced negatively— fails to produce action, and so it is more convincing to propose, given the epistemological emphasis of the *Poetics*, that this failure of a more clarifying rendering of action within intelligibility holds open the possibility of uncontrollable will, of desire that refuses to be safely held within the vessel of knowledge.

One of the more disconcerting implications of this *zeugma* of event and knowledge within the poetic plot is that Aristotelian literary history must remain essentially a sequential account of individual interpretations of these necessities of poetry. Tradition makes very little sense, in these terms, so that even those features which call out most vocally to be interpreted within a framework of influence, citation, or literary tradition are only superficially explained, and the importance of such explanation asserted to be trivial at best. For instance, the fact that poets had repeated the scene of tragedy on the terrain of “a few families only” is not the result of intertextual practice as much as it is a simple fact of the blind correspondence of reality with poetic requirements. “It was not art, but happy chance, that led poets to look for such situations and so impress the tragic quality upon their plots. They are compelled, therefore, to have recourse to those houses whose history contains moving incidents like these” (53). This difficulty indicates the distance between the prescriptions of *The Poetics* and the poetic theory of skeptical neoclassicism in Augustan England that I have been attempting to make legible. While in a sense it is merely a difference of emphasis, an absolute regression (enabled by an Ovidian attention to transformation) also distances Scriblerian poetics infinitely from the Aristotelian. From its emergence from intensified attention to translation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the emerging explicitation of the genre of imitation, and from the attention to temporality *within* representation that prepossesses the Scriblerians, “imitation” for Swift, Pope, and their poetic allies is the staging of an

encounter with writing that refuses a concern with objective mimesis that would show interest (as for Aristotle) only if an epistemological profit would encapsulate the experience of catharsis. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla note briefly that the turn to Longinus in early eighteenth-century poetics is a turn away from Aristotle's catharsis. "This is a departure from another classical authority, Aristotle, whose analysis of catharsis is to a great extent supplanted in the eighteenth-century tradition by the turn towards Longinian sublimity."<sup>36</sup> While full of reference to the "real world," Scriblerian satire flaunts its referentiality as radically irreducible, and the only knowledge it officially approves is knowledge of other texts, or of the failures of objective knowledge as such. In this writing there is indeed nothing outside of the text—if, that is, non-textual, objective existence must be certified by the translation from action to communicable knowledge. This situation of writing within a virtual realm of relations allows the Scriblerians to assert the satiric invocation of occasion, putting vast schemes of contemporary references in motion, without ultimately allowing for the production of Aristotelian recognition or epistemological conclusion about the virtual satiric world. Scriblerian satire works to resist Aristotelian encapsulation of plot by asserting its own

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds. *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11.

incompleteness, its own inability to perform epistemological certainty about the set of events it depicts.

This indifference to knowledge on the part of the Scriblerian writers does, in its way, uphold the Aristotelian assertion that action, temporality, or change is fundamentally distinct from abstractions that hypostatize change into noun forms, or into narratives that deliver epistemological packages. The function of Scriblerian satire, through its affinity to Ovidian metamorphosis, is to refuse to use epistemology to translate action into stasis, to instead produce a scene in which the reader is met with greatly irreducible actions, intensified occasions that lay bare an exceptional glimpse of the temporal without transforming that experience through a dialectical template into the justification of action to character and thought—a justification that, for the reader in Aristotle’s theory, accompanies tragedy’s ethical plot. Textuality as such, a redoubling of writing onto itself, has, ironically, provided the Scriblerians with the ability to propose that action be met as action, rather than as an ephemeral catalyst for whatever might be solidified or recuperated from the experience of action. Scriblerian satire operates under a concern to achieve a literature of action and temporality that does not of necessity lend itself to narration, *telos*, morality, and epistemology. The new virtual world opened up by the explosion of the print market provides Scriblerian satire with a way to create this literature of occasion that can act as catalyst to its own proliferation, a textual autopoiesis that centers around the virtual figure of Scriblerus himself. What this satire

asserts is that the “real” available through imitative practice is far less circumscribed, closed off in its potential, when imitation has largely relinquished the notion of an extra-textual world in which and towards which it operates. In what follows, I will, through a reading of Pope’s highly virtual and Ovidian *The Rape of the Lock*, develop this notion of a non-Aristotelian poetics that operates within the virtual world of textuality to oppose the poetic goal of the encapsulation of action and temporality within epistemological stability.

### **3.4. The Scriblerian Commodity Fetish**

“Marx should have read *The Rape of the Lock*”

--Colin Nicholson

Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, published in its five-canto form in 1714, and its final form in 1717, is not technically a Scriblerian poem—it was never considered a project of the group of friends for attribution to Scriblerus. It was in many ways a personal poem for Pope, whose engagements with Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre have been described at great length elsewhere. But Pope gave it its final form the year after he made his initial proposals to Swift about satires of the learned, and it operates by means of many of the same concerns as the texts attributed to Scriblerus (KM 14), especially those aesthetic concerns that require as their solution features of the poetics of Longinus and

Ovid.<sup>37</sup> The poem depicts the interaction of personalities who are caught in a relation to a nearly autonomous world of things that surrounds them and sweeps them up in an occasion of social ecstasy. But the rhetorical thrust of the poem's depiction of this scene of the virtual life of objects is located in the poem's Ovidian affinities. Metamorphosis dominates the orientation of the poem's form and content, and in truly Ovidian fashion, refuses to allow our judgment of the poem to come to rest on solid ethical footing. Nonetheless, the poem *is* concerned with ethics, and with preserving the possibility of ethics. It is this preservation that its Ovidian transformations attempt to embody in mock-heroic form.

The setting of the poem owes its logic of animation both to Ovid and to the figure of Scriblerus, whose existence as self-animating author-figure represents the essential aspects of the Scriblerians' recursively reflexive satiric methods. As I related in the introduction, Martinus Scriblerus is a figure whose very birth is generated by his

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<sup>37</sup> Patricia Brückmann makes an extended case for the Scriblerian origins of the poem in *A Manner of Correspondence*:

The second version of 1714 is in effect a new poem, one that is Ovidian in tendency and in tone. It is worth underlining that *after* meeting the group, notably Swift, Pope made radical alterations, so that a minor piece of heroic became a serious heroi-cornical poem, a dense epyllion with, as Earl Wasserman has shown, nearly no limits in allusion. Although the poem is shaped in a way that Scriblerian works usually are not, it *is* a Scriblerian document. Given their origins in both the Rosicrucian philosophy and in Fontenelle's *Treatise on the Plurality of Worlds*, the sylphs provide further texts for the Scriblerian concern with the mechanical operation of spirits. They act out once more that split between mind and body that both animated and agitated the Club. (81)

father's relentless textualization of his son's genesis and development. In terms of the genesis of Martinus' personality and identity, there is nothing *there* except for books, texts, or dissertated ideas. The *Memoirs* are a depiction of an almost total evacuation of the site of personality in favor of the world of print and its own complex and seemingly self-proliferating systematicity. The print industry has taken on a life of its own, and this autopoeitic public sphere institution enables the Scriblerians to imagine a monstrous birth in the form of their textual man, Martinus. His very life is imbued with the energies and circulations of the market of print commodities. He is a textual embodiment of other forms of social circulation, as well: for instance, the way in which, as Richard Kroll recounts, the anatomical theories of William Harvey regarding circulation and systems had begun to make sense out of realms of finance, commerce, and other social circulations, providing figural and conceptual bridges between anatomy and the world of commodities.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, even for readers (who could consider themselves not trapped in the world of textuality depicted by the *Memoirs*), Scriblerus was an agent of the mounting dissolution of the boundaries between a textual life and an "actual" world outside of it. The distinction begins to break down within Scriblerus' unsettling effects on the emerging institution of authorship. The coterie's publication of texts such as *Peri Bathous* and the *Memoirs* under the name of Scriblerus extends the range of what might

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<sup>38</sup> See Kroll's excellent "Pope and Drugs: The Pharmacology of *The Rape of the Lock*" *ELH* 67 (2000), 99-141.

otherwise have seemed to be an artificial, fictional, and parodic character whose setting is a world perverted by print—another Quixote, in other words.

This animation is something between that of an automaton (a lifeless but mechanically active facsimile of the human form) and a virtual reality (a technological shift that allows experience to emerge from a simulated body). We might consider the case of Scriblerus to be a parallel “world” in which an animated homonculus apparently takes on a life of its own, without any reliance or apparent imitative orientation toward some “real” world. As in the optical definition of “virtual” active in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Scriblerus is the resultant focus of six separate (Scriblerian) rays of light, joined through the prism of print culture, and brought into effective being as a virtual man. Acting back on the world of “actual” writers and readers, Scriblerus exceeded his existence in a virtual space to emerge as what thinkers in our own time would distinguish as a *virtuality*. For Murray Turoff, speaking of our computer age, virtualities are virtual systems that extend their self-animating force and effects beyond the boundaries of their parallel separation from the “real” world. It is, in our own technological moment, “the property of a computer system with the potential for enabling a virtual system (operating inside the computer) to become a real system by encouraging the real world to behave according to the template dictated by the virtual system. In philosophical terms, the property of virtuality is a system’s potential

evolution from being descriptive to being prescriptive.”<sup>39</sup> This is equivalent to the notion of the “hyperreal” delineated by Jean Baudrillard, a production by the simulacrum of a new sphere that figures itself as reality.<sup>40</sup> For the Scriblerians, operating with their eye on the relation between textual and “real” worlds, the primary concern became how not to affect a real world through the virtual realm of writing, but how to use the figure of the real world to emphasize the poetic occasion (*kairos*) of their satire in order to preserve the possibilities of further sublime literary encounter. Scriblerian writing is thoroughly convinced of what we might call the virtualization of social life, and from within that assumption, proposes certain modes or intensities of virtualization over others.

We will see, therefore, that this move from the virtual realm to the realm of virtuality, or of the acting-back of an artificial, parallel world on that of an actuality, is a recurrent theme in the poetry of the Scriblerians. The writings of the group propose that metamorphoses between realms of simulation and realms that are figured as real can have liberating, but also disastrous, effects. In the case of Scriblerus, this shift increases

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<sup>39</sup> Turoff, M. “Virtuality.” Communications of the ACM 40.9 (1997): 38.

<sup>40</sup> I mention Baudrillard only to suggest his theory as the tip of the iceberg of theories of simuacral reality that are fundamentally Cartesian in their origin. Baudrillard’s nostalgia is in essence an antiquated analysis of the situation—I argue that Pope’s rendition of it in *The Rape of the Lock* is ultimately less conservative. See Jean Baudrillard. *Simulations*. trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotexte, 1983.

the power of satire to transform larger aspects of the social field into occasion for its production. “There was almost no limit to the range of [their] satire and, apart from the central biography, the individual Scriblerian pieces could take almost any form of poetry or prose” (KM 30). Texts that may have never been read as satire could now be submitted to the destabilizing abyss of the ascription of Scriblerus’ authorship, so that Scriblerus expanded autopoietically—the institution of authorship itself, which might ostensibly be thought of as exceeding or residing separately from the texts it organizes, could now become manipulated and indeed threatened by the texts under its watch.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Meehan observes ecstatically that

Martin Scriblerus was potentially everywhere, subtly white-anting every literary text on the market, opening up parodies where no parody was intended, diffusing authorship beyond any theological model of control, and authorising a new and subversive mode of reading of a kind that Barthes would certainly approve. What the Scriblerus project achieved, in the fragments that did emerge through authorship and through outrageous imputation over those succeeding three decades, was an infusing of early eighteenth-century literary culture with deep *scriptibilité*, the 'birth of the reader' and a new kind of readerly activism, scepticism and authority, subverting all the boundaries of text and authorial control.

Meehan. “The Word Made Flesh: Festival, Carnality and Literary Consumption.” *Text*. Special Issue No. 4 (2005).

<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue4/meehan.htm>. Accessed Feb 22, 2008.

The attributive features of authorship could be claimed (“colonized”) by a virtual realm, and thus excised or ejected from that of the real, revealed in their nature to be themselves simulacral. Scriblerus was a force of spreading virtual textuality, a personality who operated as a sign of the powers of the apparently only textual world to begin to inform any and all aspects of life that had been figured as “real” over against the fictive realm of the textual.

For the metamorphosis of world into text to have liberating effects, however, the Scriblerians seem to assert that some feature of the “real” has to be held in reserve, an element that does not relate or succumb to the virtuality of text. This is a concern that motivates many of the major poems of the group, from the earliest pre-Scriblerian writings to the last, apocalyptic *Dunciad* of Pope. If Scriblerian satire produces a *position* on the encroachment of a modernity, it is that of the cautionary tale: modernity is figured as, in one sense, a largely positive metamorphosis of the world into newly animated realms of relation that can have, or appear to have, significant life of their own. But this modernity is, when these virtualities become dogmatically asserted as a goal or end of human endeavor, also a potentially destructive, potentially colonizing force that leaves no remainder in its wake, a full consumption of the world by the virtualities of the market, the text, and the commodity. Despite its affinity with the simulacrum, it is aesthetics (in the form of satire) that can, for the Scriblerians, actually propose to keep a *secret* from the absolute textualization of the world. Here, the judgment of the proper

extent to which virtuality should emerge into life is one that has an Ovidian basis: if virtuality encourages more metamorphosis, more transformation, more encounter with a transporting difference, and more sublime affect, then it is a welcome complexification of the world. But if the encroachment of the virtual becomes itself an objective, so that further metamorphosis is stifled, and autopoeisis operates to produce only more of the same rather than an expansion of differences, then what results is an apocalyptic Dulness that pervades the social scene with a virtuality without difference, and eliminates the possibility of further transformation.<sup>42</sup> The irony represented by the poem is that the intense production of vast virtual interaction would also, taken to its own limits, result in the utter stifling of the social energies it had begun to unleash. The poem provides us with the possibility of finding a fluctuating point not of equilibrium (i.e. compromise, a middle way) but of inarticulate reservation or refusal, an ineffable kernel that allows Scriblerian satire to chart its course between a completely unmoored virtual existence and a dogmatic moralism that refuses to participate in the metamorphoses of a dangerous simulacrum.

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<sup>42</sup> Regarding the metamorphic anti-dogmatism that I here identify with an Ovidian aesthetic, Robert Folkenflik proposes that "*The Rape of the Lock* is Pope's most Ovidian poem. Pope creates, as has been remarked, a dazzling world of beautiful surfaces with which he is half in love himself; but he knows that one cannot simply love them, for, as he implies through his use of metamorphosis, they cannot last." Robert Folkenflik. "Metamorphosis in *The Rape of the Lock*" *Ariel* 5, no. 2 (1974), 28. Folkenflik is of those critics who side with Clarissa in asserting a set of moral certitudes regarding these metamorphoses that inscribe life as *longue duree* rather than a series of great occasions.

This concern is paramount in *The Rape of the Lock*, a poem which sets into motion a scene of expansive and energized relations between characters and animated commodities, only to provide a set of cautions against a too eager acceptance of a fully virtual world. In its final form (1717, after the addition of Clarissa's speech), the poem depicts a massively entertaining and all-consuming social occasion of virtual relations that threatens to spin out of control. Its ending, the apotheosis of the lock, offers an Ovidian metamorphosis as a substitute for a moral or a conclusion, indicating to the reader only that what must not be allowed to happen, in the poem's absurd milieu of flirtatious mock-warfare, is an encapsulation of those immersed in the scene in a denouement productive of Aristotelian moral certainty. As we will see, the lock's demise is the moment of crisis that threatens the enabling features of the virtual realm in which it exists; with the cutting of hair, here, comes a dangerous virtuality for all involved, a moment in which whatever of the "actual" that had stood apart from the virtual is threatened to be swallowed up, and thoroughly disabled, by the passionate responses to the scene depicted in the poem. Only the lock's apotheosis offers a properly misdirecting moment of metamorphosis, in which any sense that an event has taken place is displaced onto a monument that only acts in the interests of furthering the creation of virtual interactions, and the inducement of further transformations.

The poem's dedication is an enactment of the emphasis on occasion common to all of the Scriblerians' satire—not in its actual dedicatory presence at the beginning of

the poem (a holdover from literary patronage common to most literary works of the first half of the century), but in its communication of the specific, “real” events that inform the poem. Its editor notes that the work had been “intended only to divert a few young ladies...” “[b]ut as it was communicated with the Air of a Secret, it soon found its Way into the World. An imperfect Copy having been offer’d to a Bookseller, You had the Good-Nature for my Sake to consent to the Publication of one more correct” (Poems 217). These lines make the poem into an apparent intervention into the life of Arabella Fermor whose publication had exceeded the author’s control, and with this edition, had been effectively reined in. As with all of the Scriblerians’ accounts of any of their works’ publication, the truth of this forgery and correction is buried in the practices (perhaps mastered by Pope more than anyone else) of manipulating the public into feeling heightened expectations at the point of every work’s publication through stories such as this. Regardless, we have here the image of a work that made its way out into the world improperly, without proper occasion or license from its author—on its own (“found its Way”). The present occasion of the poem, as depicted in this framing gesture, is a taming of this itinerant willfulness on the part of the poem and those who were entranced by it enough to have bought it, and a reassertion of the poem’s autonomy in its situation in the world of letters that these prior manipulations threatened.

Pope, the author-figure, takes advantage of this occasion to add what he indicates is the poem’s crucial missing feature. He identifies the “*Machinery*” at first as a

kind of entirely gratuitous supplement culled from the romance tradition, a supernatural apparatus that will, following critical prescription, enable the poem to seem complete by making it “appear of the utmost Importance.” He broadcasts the artificiality of the addition as if to say that it was simply needed to fulfill generic requirements.<sup>43</sup> But Pope depicts the supernatural creatures of the machinery as having a life of their own, one in parallel to that of the humans of the text, with only some exceptional moments of interaction: “For they say, any Mortals may enjoy the most intimate Familiarities with these gentle Spirits, upon a Condition very easie to all true *Adepts*, an inviolate Preservation of Chastity” (Poems 218). Quickly it seems as though the machinery has taken on a role beyond that of satisfying critical requirements. The sexualized interchange he depicts as available to humans and sylphs is sex without sex, an intercourse that takes place in the virtual realm itself, the realm of the sylphs. All this operates in a dream world for Belinda, the apparent “true Adept” of the poem. Belinda’s own experience of the sylphs is only indirect and hazy, yet she is represented to us as nevertheless fully *immersed* in the sylphs’ purview. The relations of the poem’s characters to the social scene of the poem is continually one of this immersion, threatened only by the refusal of immersion offered as a moral by Clarissa. I find Marie-

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<sup>43</sup> Ruben Brower notes that “[s]ignificantly enough, Ariel [Belinda’s guardian sylph] comes from *The Tempest*, the Shakespearean play that is most thoroughly permeated with Ovidian metamorphosis.” Ruben A. Brower. *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 150.

Laure Ryan's depiction of immersion to be extremely useful here: as a feature of the creation of the virtual reality enabled by reading, immersion "is the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings."<sup>44</sup> The poem takes the position that if Belinda's sexualized relations were to cross over, from a realm of virtual sexuality to that of an actual, then the loss of chastity would disable the entire relationship, and the entire scene of immersion enabled by Belinda's deferred sexuality. Being adept means being able to navigate this relationship: keep the actual intact, and the virtual's hands to itself.

If the boundary between virtual and actual is a kind of hymen, then, that an adept knows how to protect, we begin the poem with a certain feminization of the boundary or correspondence between the virtual realm and that which it simulates. But in this situation of immersion in a virtual experience, it is the actual which is protected by a hymen, and which must not be breached. The reader is being trusted to be a knowing or crafty prostitute, whose sexual encounters can be performed without damage to reputation or to future performances. The hymen of readerly chastity, protected as long as the virtual life or sexuality of the sylphs is encountered but not taken too far, is a kind of *technē* that Pope here claims may be threatened to some extent

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<sup>44</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 14.

by reading habits that are inattentive to generic boundaries—some of the “Fair Sex” have mistaken *Le Comte de Gabalis* for a novel, Pope observes, and his distinction is not that it is, rather, a romance, but that it is a supernaturalized guide to the kinds of interactions a “Fabulous” world can have with the sublunary.<sup>45</sup> What is suggested here in the dedication, however, is that the machinery represents a world of spirits that enjoys its own life parallel to that of the sublunary characters in the text, a parallel that can be and is bridged in a kind of sexual interchange that preserves, rather than endangers chastity. It is, in the terms of the poem, and of the virtuality I’ve introduced here, the figuration of an immersion into a realm separated from the real by the threat of the discontinuation of immersion itself, and its enabling possibilities.

The machinery of the poem (the army of sylphs) is not the only realm of autonomous life that seems to beckon the poem’s characters into a virtual reality. From the beginning of the first canto, the poem insists that we are enveloped by a world of *things* that are in motion, things that it would seem carry the onus of all agency within the poem. Readers of the poem have not given enough stress to the second line’s observation “[w]hat mighty Contests rise from trivial Things” (l.2)—a restatement of the

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<sup>45</sup> This only superficially explains the poem’s selection of the supernatural machinery of the Rosicrucians, of course, and many critics have speculated quite usefully about the particular set of religious and mythical references at work in the machinery. See, for example, Pat Rogers. “Faery Lore and *The Rape of the Lock*” *The Review of English Studies* 25, no. 97 (1974), 25-38.

first line, and thus an alignment of amour with triviality, but more importantly a preparation for the reader that it is an attention to things and their circulation that serves as key element of the poem's occasion. The subject is insistently slight—as slender female, as triviality, as weightless airy sylphs—and this statement sets the tone for a reading of the poem as mock-epic. The persistent linkage between epic language and pathos and quotidian courtship is prominent throughout, and allows any reader the least conversant with classical tradition to understand that there is a disconcerting combination at work. There is an implied grin in this stylistic *zeugma*—as the figure of the poet says in the dedication, the poem seeks to raise a laugh. Certainly, a laugh is not the only thing it seems to wish to accomplish, but from the beginning the unsettling mock-epic mixtures provide one fairly accessible source of delight for even a marginally informed reader (Pope's dedication asserts that it is written for the "young ladies"). But such aesthetic mapping is not enabled by the poem's *own* clear distinction between the two realms of epic and everyday. The mixture of light, quotidian, romantic intrigue with classical epic is dissolved together in solution. Readers must navigate this generic entanglement or immersion if they are to traverse the poem without fully losing their way into an uncertain territory of uncharted genre.

This indistinction of the two poetic realms is performed in the invocation, where the couplet makes a neat division between the epic sentiment and its bathetic completion that is served by the poem's synthetic mixture of the two. "Say what strange

Motive, Goddess! cou'd compel/A well-bred *Lord* t'assault a gentle *Belle*?" (I.7-8). The two realms of mock and epic intersect, and they do so through the content of the question being posed to the muse here: that of the motives of the lord whose desire for the belle results in an assault, the interior motivation that stands behind the Baron's actions—his secret. It is a question that the poem, and the muse, refuse to answer. In other situations, the sublime features of epic are applied to clearly quotidian actors or things, providing a jarring mixture that doesn't resolve itself, creating the potential for a kind of shock (represented in name by Belinda's lapdog, Shock, who operates within the offices of a pet, ascribed a kind of life and will of its own while nevertheless never being able to occupy a position of autonomous agency). The invocation contains what for the poem is nevertheless a legitimate question begged by its actions, an indication of the kind of knowledge most concealed or illegible in the scene represented by the poem. According to this invocation, the motives of individuals in the course of their pursuit of private desires is the most inscrutable feature of the scene a poem might describe, and thus the question most worthy of the goddess. If the poem is a response to this question, as its readers have proposed in so many ways, it offers only the slightest hint of what might be considered motive, revealing later, at the crucial moment, that Belinda holds a desire out of the reach of the perception of her guardian sylphs. The poem depicts a scene in which social and virtual modes of interaction are mobilized at their heart by some motive that does not make itself visible to *anyone*—not the poet, not the goddess,

not the characters who are driven by it. There *is* motive, and we do perceive sign of it, but this sign only performs the effect of motive, drawing the reader into an inner space of desire, voyeur to an almost formless flicker of desire in that interior “real,” then thrusting that voyeuristic perception outward, unfulfilled, toward action. Whatever motive the goddess is able to “say” in the poem is not said as a concept of that motive, but as a performance of it, as a movement that is, for the poem, the limit of motive’s intelligibility for all who engage it—not just the reader.

Whatever insight the goddess is supposed to offer regarding cause and motive, the first step in the discourse of the muse is in the direction of a complete fragmentation of the scene of agency—the question of who acts in this poem is one that is never simple, and thus the poem frustrates the application of easy ethical judgments. Looking at the poem’s apparent depiction of the acting subjects in the third stanza (the first after the invocation) yields a situation in which a multitude of grammatical subjects act in parallel—never quite interfering or conflicting with each other, but also, importantly, never adding up to a unified individual subject (i.e. Belinda). “Sol,” “Lapdogs,” “sleepless Lovers,” “the Bell,” “the Slipper,” “the press’d Watch,” “Belinda,” “Her Guardian Sylph,” “A Youth”—a set of actors none of whom dominate the scene. Belinda can be said to be the center, here, but she does not act or need to act in order to establish the orbit of these spheres of action around her gravity. All she does is to press her pillow—the rest is performed by objects, sylphs, and images of desirous young men. It is

as though the entire spectrum of agency within the poem had to be identified here at the inception, from the most material (Lapdogs, the Bell, Slippers) and mundane to the most ethereal and sublime (Sol; the Guardian Sylph). What emerges from this array is not a hierarchy of sublimity, however, but a leveling—these forces and agents act without the indication that they are governed by any transcendent order or motivation. Jonathan Lamb has seen an affinity between the things of the poem and still life painting, proposing that a certain intensity of emptiness haunts both: “this may be fetishism of a distinct kind, where the fashioning of a thing neither represents nor symbolizes a deity, yet generates a glamour beyond the ordinary, as if what had been made or painted had a life of its own.”<sup>46</sup> Rather than indicating the loss of a motivating deity or an inner essence, as Lamb suggests, the poem’s emphasis of surface glamour is a form of guardianship of an essence caught between or entangled with both surface and secret interior that (as Lamb indicates) must not be divulged. The motivations of the objects are indeed themselves uncertain—although we do know that they *are* motivated. Circling around the half-dozing Belinda, action in the poem’s opening scene establishes a multitude of semi-autonomous actors to which the ostensible vortex around which they orbit is largely indifferent, unable to rouse herself from slumber far enough to imbue

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Lamb. “The Rape of the Lock as Still Life” in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 45-6.

any of these actions with the force that might indicate her full intention. Are these Belinda's proxies? Are they themselves autonomous actors? The poem toys with the reader's possible understanding of the world of "things" as a series of supplements, artificial additions to the central and essential human figure, but does not allow the logic of supplementarity to emerge or dominate the reader's perspective. Instead, these things are represented consistently as semi-autonomous spheres of action, engaged in a kind of proximity to human life, but uncertainly related—there is little sense that these acting "things" can be considered mere supplements. They are engaged in their own virtual spheres of activity, and this engagement is both dependent on and autonomous from the world that animates them.

The sylphs are the most sentient of the virtual actors within the poem. Their sphere of virtual existence is one whose autonomy seems only riven by a sense of dedication to the well-being (and chastity) of Belinda. But this dedication is not a mixture, a supplementation, or some other hierarchical subsumption. There is little crossover, and indeed, as Ariel is able to inform the reader by way of a disguised dream-state whisper (crouched at Belinda's ear like Satan in his reptilian *rencontre* with Milton's Eve), the sylphs exist for the sake of the "gentle *Belle*." But this fact is powerless, and indeed, in the terms of the implicit contract at work in the poem, mustn't be able to

collapse the two realms as a result of an intervention.<sup>47</sup> Whatever dedication there is that ties the sylphs to their guardianship also demands that they perform their activity without revealing themselves to their charge. The very relation established between the airy spirits and the material belle is one founded on the necessity of the separation of the realms, and the method by which this separation is produced and maintained is one of concealment. Relation between the realm of sylphs and that of humans can only exist as relation if it conceals itself through that very act. For the reader, that separation can be transcended, but as we will see, the privileged position of the reader isn't one that is able, ultimately, to make anything of the knowledge of this hidden spirit realm. The power of the sylphs that Ariel reveals to the sleeping Belinda and the eavesdropping reader is ultimately not able to offer much protection against Belinda's own desires. In effect, the realm of the sylphs is *more* autonomous than even its representative claims it to be, unable to produce significant change in the outcome of the social scene in which Belinda is immersed. What emerges as a certainty for the reader is not that the sylphs are

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<sup>47</sup> Patricia Brückmann has shows that the sylphs were certainly influenced by the notions of Platonic love promoted by Mary Astell and John Norris, as well as by the widespread, quasi-mystical notion of the guardian angel. Pope's poem is ambivalent toward these practices, allowing them to function as indicators of the power of the virtual realm to dominate consciousness of any "real" existence, without becoming ends in themselves. Both of these important sets of influences work in the poem to prolong or preserve Belinda's place within the practices of coquetry and the mock-divinity of beauty, preserving the "contract" that I mention above. See "Virgins visited by angel powers: *The Rape of the Lock*, platonick love, sylphs and some mystics" in *The Enduring Legacy: Alexander Pope tercentenary essays*. G.S. Rousseau and Pat Rogers, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

truly in charge of this social carnival, but that their claim to be in charge is an expression of a desire on their part to act back with some clear importance onto the life of Belinda. The poem shows us this virtual desire by showing how the sylphs misperceive their own power and role—by showing us the frustration of Ariel’s initial depiction of the sylphs’ social role, the way that what the sylphs think of as their place within the interaction of spheres is actually an expression of a kind of will to power rather than an objective representation of the true interaction between airy and human realms.

The frustration of nearly all of the claims for power by the sylphs indicates that there is *something* in their desire for influence that should be understood as *interested*, and therefore perhaps troubling. The objectified Belinda is certainly the battleground of competing interests, and the sylphs are among the most prominent of these suitors, even if it is a given that their desires towards Belinda are always to be held in suspension. Indeed, their role, as stated by Ariel, is the deferral of possession itself—in other words, to ensure that Belinda does not succumb to any one set of interests, yet at the same time to continue to proliferate and heighten those interests.<sup>48</sup> “They shift the moving Toyshop of her Heart” (I.100) so that the various agents who vie for the privilege of capturing Belinda are offset against each other; their desire to cross out of their own sphere of

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<sup>48</sup> Indeed, as Max Byrd observes, the sylphs are themselves “beings in constant metamorphosis” (Byrd, *ibid*, 447) subject to an effervescing fluctuation that, in the poem’s description, shows them to be characterized by only the slightest difference from the air itself and its flows.

influence in order to incorporate Belinda serves to cancel the parallel desires from other suitors, as well as to increase desires of this type. The sylphs are emblematic in their virtual relation to Belinda of the way that these spheres of matter in virtual motion work as the opposite of systems of virtual checks and balances, systems that multiply, rather than enable fulfillment or limitation of, desire. Belinda becomes the commodity of commodities, the sphere of virtuality *par excellence*, and everybody wants her.

As exhibited in the scene at Belinda's *toilet*, however, this desire isn't for some natural, authentic, *real* feminine self at the heart of a maelstrom of supplemental supplicants. Belinda, too, is set in motion as a virtual construction, yet as a living and moving self, autonomous in that its relation to an original is inscrutable, illegible, and perhaps non-existent. As she awakes to shock's tongue, she moves past the amorous letter which seems to explain to her the content of her dream, and begins immediately the rites of worship that so many commentators have read as a scene of misogyny or ridicule of what the poem naturalizes as feminine frivolity. I want to read this scene with an attention to the many metamorphic images it offers, and with regard not to the way we are supposed to *know better* than Belinda here, but the way in which the poem would have us feel for ourselves Belinda's immersion among the many shifting movements of virtual life that are going on around her. The rites of beauty are a ritualized intensification of the motion of all of the *things* that surround Belinda, including that of Belinda's image itself. Again, we might say that in fact there is no Belinda here, as such,

if we expect an identity of interiority and personality that exceeds all the accoutrements of ornamental culture—we witness her emergence *from* these supplementations, so that the proper name Belinda can be said to also describe a virtual realm, rather than an essential identity.<sup>49</sup>

A look at the grammatical actors of the opening of the scene is again instructive: “the *Toilet*,” “the *Nymph*,” “A heav’nly Image,” “Th’inferior Priestess,” “Unnumber’d Treasures,” “Off’rings.” And then, from a scene in which at least the action of people seem to dominate (even if those people have been transformed utterly by the poetic language into elements of a ritual of transformation), we have the trappings of empire that make their appearance in the rites, representing what the poem suggests is the worship of all the world, the metamorphosis of worship into cosmetic artifacts, brought to the table of this devotee by what seems to be, rather than imperial and mercantile expansion, devotion to the production of this fair incarnation of beauty—Belinda:

Unnumber'd Treasures ope at once, and here  
The various Off'rings of the World appear;  
From each she nicely culls with curious Toil,  
And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring Spoil.

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<sup>49</sup> *Vide* Lamb: “In Pope’s hands, the image, whether viewed or viewed as viewed, is always a copy, and the movement of its parts is neither the trace of nature nor of time, but of the self-activity of made things” (“Still Life” 55).

This Casket India's glowing Gems unlocks,  
And all Arabia breathes from yonder Box.  
The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,  
Transform'd to Combs, the speckled and the white.  
Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,  
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.  
Now awful Bauty puts on all its Arms;  
The Fair each moment rises in her Charms,  
Repairs her Smiles, awakens ev'ry Grace,  
And calls forth all the Wonders of her Face;  
Sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise,  
And keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes.

(I.129-144)

Here, the bathetic transformation is a remarkable change for even readers of the slightest attunement to the political stakes of the poem, who have to remain silent as the poem collapses the extensive hulk of an entire system of global trade, warfare, and exploitation to a ritual summoning of the goddess of beauty, and the incarnation of her divinity on the visage of her transformed devotee. The poem offers hints of ambivalence toward a celebration of empire by way of the fetish, but it is the multi-layered interaction of already virtually animated spheres of activity that interests me here, the

poem's insistence that the realms of empire and beauty are always already entangled. The worship of the Goddess (Belinda's image in the mirror) is performed by the priestesses (Belinda and her maid), but also by the activity of these objects, whose presence at the table is not indicated as representative of action, but as agency itself. Further, these still-active commodities are themselves revealed to be the product of metamorphosis, in which other actions (whether the convulsions of empire, or the transformations of the process of labor) have been changed into commodity form. All of these agents of the scene work to create the incarnation of beauty that can turn away from the mirror and enter the social scene. Here, in other words, is an entire theory of the commodity, one that is certainly aware *avant la lettre* of Marx's insight into the metamorphic deformations of capital. But the poem offers a far more ambivalent judgment of commodities: whereas for Marx what is crucial in the metamorphosis is the emergence of a dominant stasis (what Lukacs would later develop as *reification*) and the occlusion of the social and temporal relations that enabled the transformation, for Pope's muse the commodities of empire persist in a life of their own that can't simply be traced to a origin that has been foreclosed and mystified. In other words, while Marx is devoted to unveiling "the Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret," Pope proposes that this secret itself can, if it is submitted to a thoroughly iconoclastic skepticism,

animate social life intensely.<sup>50</sup> Using the overarching logic of the perpetuating force of Ovidian metamorphosis, the poem suggests that the fact that tortoises and elephants have been changed into a mixture of tortoiseshell and ivory in a comb is productive of further life, further self-animation and transformation, and knowledge of the separate “stages” of this metamorphic combination is false in its pretensions to Aristotelian recognition.<sup>51</sup> The utopian thrust of the poem’s understanding of commodities is not that it would have us see in the bathetic scene of the toilet the preferred endpoint for all imperial endeavor. The simple empirical distance is great between the professed aims of empire (i.e. nation, sovereignty, expansion, strength) that circulate in general discourse and the notion that all of empire’s activity is, rather, a rite of homage to the goddess of beauty. How are we to understand this crucial *bathos*, in which the great process of empire is reduced to the construction of feminine beauty? Are we to read it as *reductio ad absurdum*? Sarcasm? The textual clues for a completely assured mode of reading the “mock epic” features of the poem are actually rather slim. The toilet scene’s subversion of dominant understandings of the world, its gesture towards a pagan ceremony that redefines the bible in its serial enumeration among the other implements of the dressing

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<sup>50</sup> See Karl Marx. *Capital: Volume I*. trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 161

<sup>51</sup> See Byrd, 453.

table (the famous *zeugma* of “Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux” (I.138)), its jarring reinterpretation of the *entire* imperial scene of production, from the material (colonization, labor, production) to the immaterial (beauty, worship)—these force a reader even as distant in assumptions as we are to experience the poem’s totalizing reinterpretive thrust. Because of its reduction of “serious” spheres of activity to a scene of “superficial” beauty, this reinterpretation seems to be ridiculous. But as with Scriblerian satire in general, this distance, and the opposing modes of interpretation it leaves us, are the only “clues” about how to interpret the poem—and this doesn’t point with any certainty towards reading it as an act of ridicule directed at social frivolity. At best, the ridicule that we can glean from the poem is entirely mixed with the daunting prospect that this is a sincere reinterpretation of the world from the position of Belinda, or from this aristocratic milieu. The poem takes quite seriously that this mode of interpretation is valid: it is valid because it is the product of a scheme of interacting virtual spheres that have been set in motion throughout the social scene, from the bottom to the top. The poem ultimately cautions us of the potential of the ultimately bathetic effects of these virtual spheres—they tend to self-promotion, and thus to a kind of general bathetic effect in which each individual can perceive him/herself to be the center and thus the “secret” of all of the world’s activity. Ultimately the poem proposes that this is taking things too far—but not that the intensities of virtual or commodity life are themselves to blame. We should move here to further develop the poem’s opinion of

the virtual activity with which it fills the world it depicts, and then to evoke just what kind of cautionary tale the *Rape* offers us.

To move beyond the toilet scene, we can say that the poem stages this rite of beauty in order to recursively extend the reach of the virtual, so that we can now see, after Belinda's dressing-table composition, that (to review) the ongoing motive force behind the social life of Belinda's society is thoroughly saturated with commodification or virtualization, so that there is no space of pure uncontaminated "self" available within it Belinda herself is indistinguishable from a production of this interlocking system of virtual interactions. The poem promotes an uncertainty with regard to whether there is a Belinda, or a part of Belinda, who resists or does not emerge as a process of virtual activity. These virtualized beings (commodities) are, when operating according to the apparent social energy that imbues the entire scene, productive of transformations, of further changes, of the construction of new spheres of virtuality out of old.

The scene and the first canto end with the evocation of a perspective from which we *might* judge the spectacle being produced here to be *false*. Someone—the reader? those in Belinda's social circle?—gives credit where credit is not due: "*Betty's* prais'd for Labours not her own" (l.148). The poem's awareness of labor unacknowledged extends far beyond Betty, here—coming as it does on the heels of the list of imperial commodities, this is as close to a formulation of Marx's "fetishism" as we might want.

Betty is, in other words, a pattern for a general misprision that governs the scene.

Belinda's wonderful beautification is credited to a scene that is, according to the poem, actually the product of a realm of actors that remains invisible to all who consume it. For the poem, it's the work of the sylphs that has been occluded and reappropriated to the realm of the human, which is, in the poem's logic, a transformation across the boundaries of virtual activity, a phase change or metamorphosis of one type of labor into another, neither equivalent nor accessible to the other. In contrast to the depiction of the fetish offered by Marx, the trouble of this misappropriated credit is not that the scene of commodified labor has stifled human social relations. The misapprehension, indeed, the invisibility of the *true* labor that has produced the implements of the entire toilet scene is in some sense irrelevant—the metamorphosis of labor produces a metamorphosed and rejuvenated set of social relations, virtual spheres of interaction that allow for the many energies and desires of social life despite the occlusion of the sphere of labor. And to be sure, the sylphs are only a thin layer of labor that operates as mediation between empire and the composition of Belinda. Here is a limited utopia of the fetishism of the commodity, a positive evaluation of the ways in which commodities virtualize (and thereby energize) social relations that rests on the judgment that there is no way to produce accurate knowledge of an uncommodified, unentangled state. The commodity is, in Pope's poem, imbued with only *practical* utopian possibility.

Theoretical knowledge of the commodity fetish is both unavailable to all involved, and false in its construction of social relations that are unpolluted by metamorphosis.

Canto II opens up for the reader the full vista of the commodified or virtualized utopia. The poem metamorphoses every aspect of the social scene into frenetic virtual occasion, a potentially endless series of energized moments that rewrite the terrain of interactions in terms of the various commodities that populate it. This metamorphosis occurs in part by the light imparted by Belinda, a transformative illumination that emerges from her gaze—Belinda is the great experience of conversion for those around her, their experience of an all-consuming light on their road to Damascus. “Bright as the Sun, her Eyes the Gazers strike,/And, like the Sun, they shine on all alike” (II.13-14). Her face, as the light’s source, produces a forgetting of any faults her companions might ascribe to her—an indication of the power of the goddess of beauty, but also a transformation of all around her from individuals whose self-interest might arm them with criticism against Belinda’s excessive pride, to subjects of her absolute commitment to becoming a commodified or virtualized self. Belinda serves as revelation or harbinger of the sweep of commodification across the lives of the revelers on the Thames.

With the force of this conversion narrative, and the persistent attention to the objectification of social life, it is tempting to express (as it may seem that I did in the previous sentences) the idea that this transformation has *replaced* a non-commodified, authentic social space with its virtual outcome. Attention to the poem’s careful narration

shows, however, that this isn't what the poem describes—only Clarissa, whom we will address shortly, proposes a hint of this kind of narrative. Canto II is positively descriptive, rather than openly nostalgic or overtly critical. There are hints that virtualization is a kind of entrapment (of Belinda's curls: "Love in these Labyrinths his Slaves detains"), but the type of slavery lived out in this virtual frame of activity (the "love" of this scene of courtship) has hardly been represented as onerous—it is a euphemistic expression of the way attraction brings new participants to Belinda's orbit, setting them in motion around her beauty. The Baron is no less a "victim" of this attraction, and the poem spends some time developing the power of his desire. We should address briefly the nature of the Baron's desire, and its relation to commodification or the virtual realms that range in concentric circles around that exceptional commodity, Belinda.

The "Adventurous Baron" wishes to possess Belinda's locks. As we know, this is to be the "rape" depicted by the poem, and the distance between the violence of that term and the events of the poem has been the subject of much interpretive questioning—I will return to this violence in the fourth chapter. It can hardly be denied that the nature of the poem's "mock" relation to classical genre can be located at the site of the term "rape," in which what might have been an Ovidian tale of Jupiter's desire, or the avoidance of assault by metamorphosis like Lodona in "Windsor-Forest," turns into the desire of a suitor for a piece of hair—an apparent dislocation or sublimation of the

violence of the act onto a fetish. This does not objectively undermine the possibility of considering the poem's plot as a story of gendered violence—indeed, hemmed in by the way in which the Baron's act asserts that he has captured something essential, Belinda has no way to counter by exerting her own autonomy in return—much of the intensity of her response to the Baron centers on her desire to remain undefined by the act of his appropriation. The Baron's desire, however, as it is expressed here, is bathetically attached to this fragment of Belinda's constructed image, and the poem does not seem to direct us to a consideration of this as an *unnatural* orientation, a perversion by way of fetish. It is passed over as, rather, a natural possibility, or at least, an incontrovertibly forceful desire. Caught up in this synecdochal (but not therefore unnatural) lust, the Baron begins his own rites of worship in order to sway divine favor to allow him to attain the hairs. Here we encounter a clearly Scriblerian moment, in which the devotion to the goddess is paid in part by the offering of texts. Here is a textual second life in which the "twelve vast *French Romances*" and "tender *Billet-doux*" are put into motion in a different way, not as objects of consumption (i.e. reading, diversion), but as objects of sacrifice, the concoction of a feast for the goddess out of a donation of apparently valuable earthly relics of love. The sacrifice arms the Baron's desire with the power of occasion, making it clear to the reader that this desire is to come to some culmination in the course of the plot. Accompanying the books that are given over to the fire are things less clearly commodified, such as the "am'rous Sighs" and the Baron's own "ardent

Eyes” —these fleeting bodily expressions are frozen and put into motion in the service of this occasion, this all-or-nothing request for aid from the gods. We might call it reification or hypostatization if the poem did not propose so strongly that the motion of these social objects and gestures *continues* in new form. While both the original objects and their metamorphic embodiments (the sacrifice that is to entice the gods) can be said to be bathetic in comparison to the subject matter in Ovid’s *carmen*, this bathos does not serve to disable the transformative energy with which commodified social life is imbued in the poem. In such a world in which perhaps the only content available to social life *is* bathetic, a perpetually metamorphic chain of changes can still be accessed in order to unleash the power of the bathos, to allow it to express the *hypsous* still available to it.

Following the Baron’s invocation of his desire’s ceremonious importance, the poem mobilizes the sylphs, the most vitally active of the poem’s hypostatized features of humanity. Imitating Milton’s Satan, Ariel warns his minions of the dangers he has darkly glimpsed, invoking in the process a perspective on living social relations from the perspective of the adjunct and servile life lived by the sylphs. Here, in his concern as protector of Belinda’s circulation as commodity, Ariel is unsure

Whether the Nymph shall break *Diana’s* Law,

Or some frail *China* Jar receive a Flaw,

Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade,

Forget her Pray’rs, or miss a Masquerade,

Or lose Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball;

Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that *Shock* must fall.

(II. 105-110)

The list of possibilities consists of apparently bathetic objects of consumption yoked to less tangible abstractions such as worship, emotion, or the prohibition of an abdication of chastity. To read this list as evidence of the poem's tendency to mock the *hypsous* of the epic by bringing its grandiose concerns to the bathetic practices of daily life is certainly a valid and important method. But rather than leading us to conclude that the poem therefore mocks the quotidian in its pretenses, ultimately rejecting it in favor of the more sublime abstractions that the quotidian attempts to capture, this passage and the many others like it should be taken seriously as depictions of a social scene in which practices of social interaction that have been abstracted and codified circulate along with objects which are understood (and witnessed) to operate in precisely the same way. The china jar is equivalent to the hymen, from the sylphs' perspective, not because the poem wants us to have a laugh at stupid aristocrats who fetishize eastern artifacts, but because both are examples of the way in which social life is played out through the circulatory practices of abstraction, hypostatization, and commodification. The sylphs' role as protectors is to defend the circulation of metamorphosed humanity, to prevent the end of the vitality of social life as it is lived

out in the relations between these virtual abstractions of the human body, whether their origin is in sexual practice or in imperial labor.

What is it that threatens the sylphs' role as protectors of the proliferation of metamorphosis? It is, to them, something absolutely antithetical to the purposes of their animated interaction with Belinda and others. The "dire Event they wait" is "the Birth of Fate," another mock-epic aggrandizement of a set of quotidian concerns. But to take the poem more seriously in its depiction of the everyday scene, what *is* the dire Event? Why does it hold such power and such consequences for all involved? As a preliminary answer I will propose that it is an encounter that brings to a halt the total immersion in the poem's commodity relations shared by its characters. The poem produces the shock of this cessation by first showing further the way in which sexual tensions are materialized in virtual encounters—in the gossip of the court, the talk with which the gentry reinforce their insertion into a world of the circulation of commodities. The mock-epic scene of the game of ombre follows, a Homeric rendition of the intensity of the human struggles that are distilled into banal objective interactions—the very essence of a Popean *bathos*. It is punctuated by a layered parodic citation of the supreme Longinian sublimity, that of Belinda's utterance of the performative words of the God of the book of *Genesis*, which also serve as a citation of Pope's own rendition of Queen Anne in

*Windsor-Forest*. "Let Spades be Trumps! she said, and Trumps they were" (III.46).<sup>52</sup> The performative pronouncement presides over a scene in which the sexual tensions between Belinda and the Baron, as well as the grisly violence of the epic, can find expression through the displaced violence of the card game. Relations between people are replaced by relations between cards, which now seem to have an animation and motivations all their own:

...The *King* unseen  
Lurk'd in her Hand, and mourn'd his captive *Queen*.  
He springs to Vengeance with an eager pace,  
And falls like Thunder on the prostrate Ace.  
The Nymph exulting fills with Shouts the Sky,  
The Walls, the Woods, and long Canals reply.

(III.95-100)

To risk an excess of repetition of the mode of reading I propose here, this scene of play is less conducive of a critique of aristocratic frivolity than it is assertive of the very

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<sup>52</sup> Howard Weinbrot takes notice of the connection to Longinus here: "Pope gives her both God's creative mantle and a version of the words Longinus cited as the archetype of divine sublimity, in which thought and deed are simultaneous." Howard D. Weinbrot. "The Rape of the Lock and the contexts of warfare" in *The Enduring Legacy: Alexander Pope Tercentenary Essays*. G.S. Rousseau and Pat Rogers, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) The parallel between the two passages and the passage by Longinus is also noted by Patricia Brückmann in *A Manner of Correspondence*, 28.

real ways in which sexual and emotional struggles have become hypostatized into objects that have been set in motion, into interaction with a life apparently their own. Even as the poem ejects us from the virtual battle of the card game, we find we are watching a virtual Belinda watching and exulting over the outcome, filling a scene of objectified life with her voice, which is returned as echo (which is depicted as the agency of those surfaces that return her cry), another instance of the figures of mirroring that the poem uses to describe its virtual transformations.

Coffee follows, a commodity that we all know holds a special status among consumable items in the early modern period. Often depicted as itself able to give life, to produce intoxication, and indeed, to exemplarily represent the spoils of imperial mercantilism, coffee makes the claim to be entwined with social life as more than a mere “social lubricant” in *The Rape of the Lock*. Rather than inert commodity that enables or catalyzes circulation of some real social interaction (i.e. a supplement), coffee is here another of the commodities set in motion by the virtualization of the social scene. It still holds the power of acceleration, however, and in this regard does add something to the social scene—but it is the encounter between coffee and other virtual figures that characterizes this addition: a set of metamorphic conjunctions that find coffee and its consumers transformed. Coffee is depicted, along with its self-motivated accoutrements (“Japan,” “Berries,” “Mill,” “Lamp”) as animating and distributing *itself*, and in so doing, animating the spirits of all who go on to consume it—especially the Baron. It is

thus more than a supplement—it is a virtual figure within the broader set of such figures that are engaged in a complex whirl of interaction, engagement, and metamorphosis. The change produced by coffee is one that strengthens the hurricane of commodity flows, and strengthens the Baron’s desire for one particular element of that bathetic storm. The Baron’s desire, apparently brought to the brink of some kind of crisis, is nevertheless powerless—even with the metamorphosis that results from the interaction between Baron and coffee, stratagems result—fantasies of the fulfillment of desire. Here the poem provides an Ovidian cautionary note:

Ah cease rash Youth! desist ere 'tis too late,<sup>53</sup>  
Fear the just Gods, and think of *Scylla's* Fate!  
Chang'd to a Bird, and send to flit in Air,  
She dearly pays for *Nisus'* injur'd Hair! (III. 121-4)

The poet/muse performs an odd compulsion to warn the Baron—odd, since the narration has its origin at the far side of the events of the poem. But the cautionary tone, voiced here by the poet, serves as the beginning of a general caution with respect to the kind of action the Baron is about to undertake—the poem will become, from this

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<sup>53</sup> This line recalls not only the Ovidian episode of Scylla and Nisus but the powerful entreaty of Apollo to his son Phaeton, who asks for a deadly gift as a sign of love: “Let not my son a fatal gift require,/But, O! in time, recall your rash desire;” (Garth II. 88-9). The poem’s fatherly advice to the Baron softens our perception of his desires—instead of the unforgivable transgression of a sexually violent sociopath, we are invited to see him as an uncomprehending adolescent who will learn from his mistake.

moment forward, a cautionary tale regarding the grand scene of virtual life it has unfolded. The Baron, transformed by his encounter with the commodities of the coffee-table, is warned that what he seeks will betray the good of the whole (i.e. the parallel to Nisus' walled city of Alcahœ, besieged by King Minos of Crete in the *Metamorphoses*, book 8). Ralph Cohen notes that the reversal of gender here is shared by the poem as a whole—the Baron takes the place of the Ovidian Scylla, daughter of Nisus, whose love for Minos betrays her father and her safety, averted only by their transformation into birds.<sup>54</sup> What is striking about Ovid's depiction of Scylla is that she is depicted as fantasizing about a rape—about *being* raped, rather than perpetrating sexual violence:

Well might a God her Virgin Bloom desire,  
And with a Rape indulge his amorous Fire.  
Oh! had I Wings to glide along the Air,  
To his dear Tent I'd fly, and settle there:  
There tell my Quality, confess my Flame,  
and grant him any Dowry that he'd name. (Garth's Ovid VIII.54-59)

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<sup>54</sup> Ralph Cohen. "The Reversal of Gender in 'The Rape of the Lock'" *South Atlantic Bulletin* 37:4 (1972), 58-60. The feminization of the social scene is an important element of the commodification depicted by the poem, and leads to the condemnation of the Baron's actions in terms of their gendered short-sightedness—the Baron's recuperation of the possibility of masculinized action is shown to be misdirected and results in a general crisis.

What for Scylla is depicted as a desire for a very real sexual encounter is, for the Baron, a desire that operates on and through a fetish—desire, even this desire that steps out of prescribed bounds, operates at a remove from any vision of its fulfillment in a “real” setting. The lock, for Scylla, is the last *barrier* to the fulfillment of her desire, an empowered object that enables her father to stand in warring opposition to her beloved Minos. “My sole Obstruction is my Father’s Hair” (Garth’s Ovid VIII.72), an externalization of the figure of hymen that Scylla then pierces, cutting it from her father’s head in order to move beyond its influence to the fulfillment of her desire. King Minos, when faced with this gift, reacts powerfully in “abhorrence,” refusing the now lifeless vestige of Nisus as offering and, in an apparent act of respect for a masculine justice (or horror at the lust of the woman), removes his fleet, abandons siege, and leaves the furious Scylla raging in front of everything she had just sacrificed. Scylla swims wildly after Minos, and with the help of Cupid manages to catch it: as she embraces the vessel, her father Nisus now changed to a hawk swoops to attack her, forcing her to abandon her grasp on the ship (Garth VIII 247). She falls, and is changed in the process to a lark, taking the name Ciris as reference to the hair with which she attempted to barter her body. Scylla’s monstrous desire serves as a bridge to the next tale, depicted by the poet as a parallel to that of Minos’ mother, who engendered the race of minotaurs through her consummation of a bestial lust.

There is no easy moral in this metamorphic tale; the overweening lust is not punished as much as it provides the occasion for an event, along with a transition to another tale. The abhorrence of Minos is not universalized, nor is it explicated by the poet. If the Baron were to consider how his immoderate lust parallels Scylla's, he would no doubt be caught in the abyss of the differences in the two cases, forced to reckon with the way in which the circumscribed desire caught up in virtual social relations cannot be easily translated into a tale in which the virtual (fantasy and the prohibitions represented by the figures of hymen) is registered as the enemy of desire. But perhaps most damning for a moralization of the tale, Ovid depicts a woman whose desire is not judged to be *essentially* improper: to have such desire for Minos is depicted as a phenomenon that is irreducible to ethical knowledge or to an Aristotelian *anagnorisis*. Likewise, the Baron's desire for the lock, while trapped within the bathetic diminutions of the mock-epic qualities of the poem, is not dismissible as itself inauthentic or lamentable. The poem allows for an irreducible element, here, a feature of the Baron's desire that is not coded by the virtual scene, nor by the moralization offered afterward by Clarissa (and likewise, Belinda is also revealed to have such an irreducible desire). The Baron ruins the occasion depicted by the poem by choosing to act in a way that is effectively contrary to the virtual framework in which all of the revelers are engaged. His scissors-snip forces an end to the intensified transport enjoyed by Belinda and her faithful through the first three Cantos of the poem. But the poem expresses a kind of

ambivalence toward the Baron's excessive act that refuses to encode it into the certainty of a moral lesson, transforming his trophy into the unseen sign of its very failure to have overcome the metamorphic intensities of the occasion.

The rape is followed by a strongly Ovidian scene of exchange between two worlds. Patricia Brückmann sees Canto IV's "Cave of Spleen" as "[t]he most overtly Ovidian part of the poem," but I propose that the valence of the realm of the gnomes in their underworld is instead that of a force that operates in opposition to the active continuation of metamorphosis.<sup>55</sup> As John Butt notes, it is Ovid's cave for Envy that serves as the model for the lair of Spleen (232n). Within, all is horrible half-transformed incoherence, a seething mixture of forms that the poem lists in abundance. In particular, critics have noted the "Bodies chang'd to various Forms by *Spleen*" (IV.48), their deformed and macabre representation of human bodies that have become half-mixed with the form of objects, or across boundaries. "Maids turn'd Bottels" seems to imply the transformation of woman into a figure for the poem's despicable misogyny. But Spleen is the Queen of all that stifles immersion in social scenes, whether it is a pimple, suspicion, or discomposed hair (IV.65-75). "Chagrin" works to *eject* its victims from their immersion in whatever metamorphoses they may have been engaged, leaving them trapped in the middle of transformation, or trapped in a form to which they had been

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<sup>55</sup> *A Manner of Correspondence*, 81-2.

changed. Maids as bottles who demand corks are, if taken to stand for all women as a nature or essence, damningly figured—clearly an expression of a kind of hatred for femininity. But women can only be trapped in this metamorphosed form in Spleen's underworld: it is *ressentiment*, disenchantment, anger, and the other disaffections that produce half-completed or hypostasized metamorphoses. These affective states are the result of the *failure* of immersion to act as transport for those who are engaged in social life. Marie-Laure Ryan proposes that immersion in the virtual reality of text operates by way of a "transportation" that is striking in its transformative and affective similarities to the metamorphic concerns of Pope's poem. "Imaginative involvement" is made up of a "'split-subject' attitude of the reader who transports herself into the textual world but remains able to contemplate it with aesthetic or epistemological detachment" (Ryan 98). I would suggest that the "split" of the subject immersed in the world of virtual relations depicted in the poem is the sign of a divide between immersion in social life and an allegiance to what the poem considers to be the "real": not the identity of its characters outside of commodity culture, nor the material basis for that culture, but the ineffable essence of self that both funds and remains aloof from the experience of immersion. As with Boileau's Longinus, whose notion of "transport" describes the aesthetic exchange that allows the creation of new subjectivities, Pope's "real" is only present when nothing is stable, when flux dominates the whole scene. When the motions of social life stop and characters find themselves affectively detached or ejected from the circulations and

flows that surround them, then they return to or produce a notion of “reality” that is, from the poem’s perspective, dogmatic and false, unfaithful to the ineffable “real” that exists as the secret of transformation.

To move to further indication of these concerns, in the scene that follows the gnome’s delivery of Chagrin, Belinda speaks in the guise of her activation as “the *Nymph*,” bemoaning the fate of her hair. In sympathy with the revelation of the presence of an “Earthly lover lurking at her heart” that disarms Ariel at the moment of the rape, here Belinda expresses a regret that she did not keep her entire self in the form of a secret—a momentary expression of regret at the highly public nature of her guise as the production of beauty. She is quick to move past this self-reproach, but Clarissa clearly takes this as a weakness. Clarissa, occupying the poem’s “desert of the real,” begins Canto V with the speech about which so much has been written, a rendition of Sarpedon’s entreaties to Glaucus in Homer’s *Illiad*.<sup>56</sup> Providing what might be called a Christian-realist rendition of the great occasion in which these members of the gentry are embroiled, Clarissa (herself also a “Nymph” within this masquerade—here, as commentator on the revelry, unable to occupy a place of identity removed from it) evokes the temporality of the progression of age towards death, and uses this temporality to criticize that of the great production of social occasion as waste, frivolity,

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<sup>56</sup> See Weinbrot, “*The Rape of the Lock*,” 40-48.

and excess. Clarissa's depiction of the temporality of aging places human actions within an economy in which all actions either contribute or detract from the accumulation of "Merit" or "Pow'r." The speech is powerfully, and starkly, contradicted, however, by the refusal of the revelers to conform to such an economy—Clarissa is condemned as "Prude," and a fiercely sexualized battle ensues in which each of the two sides engages in various ways of killing the desires of the other. Howard Weinbrot has forcefully argued that Clarissa's moral perspective is that of the poem as a whole, dismissing those critics who have attended to the ironies of Clarissa's role as infected with "Ovid redivivus or some other theology" ("*The Rape of the Lock*" 22n2). Here, I think that I have shown that it is impossible to ignore the Ovidian features of the poem that *do*, in their way, promote a theology of metamorphosis, a devotion to social transformations that produce mysterious and vivid incarnations of an ineffably human divinity. To argue the reverse—that the poem gives us its meaning in the speech of Clarissa—fails to account for the way the powers and mysteries of virtualized social life are both intensely transporting and dangerously petty. The speech of Clarissa refuses to deal with this ambivalence, and Weinbrot does as well in his reading of Clarissa and her rendition of Homer's Sarpedon. On a generic level, the Ovidian relation to the epic so carefully imitated and intensified by Pope does not allow the simple reference to Sarpedon to do whatever certain moral work it perhaps performs in its original Homeric context. Weinbrot's assured dismissal of the poem's less than warm treatment of Clarissa ignores

its thoroughly ironic mode of imitation of ancient models, and its positive representation of the intensities and wonders of the kind of frivolous social occasion rejected by the economy proposed by Clarissa.

Threatened by Belinda's bodkin, which garners ekphrastic attention here in a brief tale of its various metallurgical transformations, the Baron is commanded to "*Restore the Lock!*" It is an ambiguous request—certainly, the Baron is not to be allowed to keep the trophy of his transgression of the bounds of decorum. And his refusal at first seems to be a willful act in the mold of what Howard Weinbrot has described as an "adaptation... of epic heroes' ungenerous self absorption, like Achilles' refusal to return Hector's body until his suppliant father ransoms it."<sup>57</sup> But as a hymen-like forfeiture, the lock cannot literally be returned to its former place and role. The echoing cries of Belinda come from "all around," creating the effect of a general cry in unison for the Baron to accede to a request that carries with it the significant outrage of the party as a whole. It is the simulation of a moral judgment, but the poem forestalls any moral economy by absconding with the lock itself: it has escaped all of the assembly and, seen by none but the muse (whose account, in an odd emphasis on readerly skepticism, the poet asks us to "trust"), "A sudden Star, it shot thro' liquid Air, / And drew behind a radiant *Trail of*

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<sup>57</sup>See Weinbrot, "*The Rape of the Lock*," 31.

*Hair*" (V.127-8). "The lock is an idol that breaks itself as soon as ever it is supposed to mean more than nothing."<sup>58</sup>

The poem represents the mechanism of this apotheosis-*cum*-disappearance as the agency of *the lock itself*, indicating that, as in the final transformation of the *Metamorphoses* in which the spirit of Julius Caesar becomes a star, it "withdrew" with only a divinity (here, the muse) as a witness, a poetic act of witness parallel to Ovid's Julius Proculus of the *Fasti*, witness to the specter of Romulus who instructs him to encourage the wayward Romans in their religious unity. In the Garth-Tonson *Metamorphoses*, the moment of Caesar's stellar change is striking in its combination of sublime solemnity and intense irony. Here, the muse is the witness of Cypria's intervention with Caesar's soul, and we are let in on this otherwise private vision of Caesar's rise. The poem proposes, perhaps entirely facetiously, that Augustus' greatness requires his father's deification (a critique of the ideological function of the hero-worship of Caesar). The goddess Cypria, whose care it is to guard and promote the Roman lineage from that of Aeneas and the Trojan war to the present, looks with deep concern on the possibility that Caesar will be the last of such an unbroken line—a concern that seems aimed at the narrative metamorphoses as well, in advance of the arrival of the far less republican Augustus. Parallel to the sylphs' apparent helplessness in the face of

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<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Lamb, "The Rape of the Lock as Still Life," 61.

approaching fate, “Not Gods can alter Fate’s resistless Will; / Yet they foretold by Signs  
th’ approaching Ill.” (Garth’s Ovid XV 515). Caesar’s assassination comes as once more  
human endeavor has become too “impious” — a judgment not against Caesar and his  
lineage as much as a fateful sacrifice for the crimes of his race—but a repetitive trope for  
metamorphosis in the poem. As Caesar falls, Cypria hides his body in a cloud, but Jove  
calls her out by affirming that her efforts will necessarily fail to dupe fate. But fate has  
also decreed (its entire course is written out in “perennial Adamant” in “Fate’s Abode”  
(517)) that Caesar “shall shine / Among the Gods” and carry his lineage onto an heir  
who will regain the Gods’ approval and sponsorship (518). After cataloguing the  
imperial conquests and mastery of “civil Studies” and “Virtues” to be attained by  
Augustus, Jove offers a solution for Cypria’s care for Caesar (indicating perhaps that  
Augustus’ successes will not assuage her):

Mean-time, your Heroe’s fleeting Spirit bear,  
Fresh from his Wounds, and change it to a Star:  
So shall great Julius Rites divine assume,  
And from the Skies eternal smile on *Rome*. (518-9)

These orders carry the transformation in a chain of command, from Fate to Jove  
to Cypria, which the latter goddess quickly translates into reality:

This spoke; the Goddess to the Senate flew;  
Where, her fair Form conceal’d from mortal View,

Her *Caesar's* heav'nly Part she made her Care,  
Nor left the recent Soul to waste to Air;  
But bore it upwards to its native Skies:  
Glowing with new-born Fires she saw it rise;  
Forth springing from her Bosom up it flew,  
And kindling, as it soar'd, a comet grew:  
Above the Lunar Sphere it took its Flight,  
And Shot behind it a long Trail of Light. (519)

Caesar becomes a divinity, a sacrificed mortal given the divine memorial of a blazing comet, in the interest of ensuring that his heir Augustus will find the successes of power that are to be his. The poet here provides a series of parallels of father/son successions that are anything but earnest in their praise of Augustus' succession. The great praise of Augustus is clearly streaked by bitter irony—no doubt in part because of Ovid's exile by Augustus in 8 AD for reasons that remain mysterious (but were likely personal). What Ovid leaves us with is Augustus as a hyperbolically-praised decline from Caesar's grandeur.

What Pope leaves us with is an imitation of the ironies of the final moments of Ovid's poem in its failure to serve as an ending to the events of the narrated plot. While Caesar's star is put to use by Cypria (and Fate), and is not allowed to "waste to Air," the recuperation of the lock is oriented toward the commemoration of intensities and

occasions with less certain results. The poem's final lines depict an inevitable "reality" behind the great machinations of these powerful social frivolities, but it is an inevitability staved off to some extent by the memorialization of the conflict over the lock that threatened to put an end to the festivities. The Muse has "consecrate[d]" Belinda's lock by the poem's narration, indicating that the role for the poem's depiction of the event is one of continuation and bathetic or ironic deification. The lock's transformation into a comet is also transformed by the Muse, here, into an indication that the poetic narrative of the conflicts surrounding Belinda's finest hours are *also* to serve as monument. Even further than Ovid, whose Caesar-comet offers either ironic commentary or paternal approval for the contemporary political scene of the poem, Pope's rendition of the lock's memorialization is a gesture that the poem expresses as a proliferation and prolongation of intensity beyond the scale of a real human life. The quotidian and bathetic elements of the plot should not fool us, here: the poem sees itself as the memorial to a powerful, if ultimately too unruly, occasion that can help to ensure the continuation of further occasions of its kind. It is a catalyst to further metamorphic social encounters imbued with the energy and fluctuating affects available to the intensely relating commodities and virtualities of Belinda's world. It is not a matter of the poem's acceptance of the events of its plot as a *valid* or proper social occasion. The poem celebrates occasion itself, however bathetic—this is the nature of its satire, and of Scriblerian satire more generally. The final lines of *The Rape of the Lock* are an indication

that the energies of the social interactions of its plot are of monumental importance, even if they are also not exempt from ridicule. Indeed, it is satiric ridicule that allows the poem to stress the positive, formal elements of the occasion without dogmatically accepting the necessity of all of the contents of Belinda's world of parlor games. The features of this *particular* occasion cannot be left out if the satiric emphasis on occasion itself is to find its way into poetic expression. Scriblerian satire always forces us to take the bad in order to have any access to the good.

This is to say that despite the poem's investment in the metamorphic community of the commodified social space of its plot, it is also reserved about casting itself in with the revelers and the particular ways in which they create the intensities of their occasion. The poem does not judge as much as it describes with a separation or distance that can both offer perspective on the artificiality of the social life of the plot, and show the way in which this artificiality has covered the entire scene with its enabling effects. This description makes available to us a set of occasions that are imbued with metamorphic potential, the sublime transport of the moment sweeping all of the characters and the reader up into its whirlwind of identificatory uncertainty. But the poem, or the poet, and even the Muse, reserve themselves in the face of this maelstrom—this is emblemized by the jarring revelation of the unexpected presence of the “Earthly lover lurking” at the seat of Belinda's desires (III.144), a revelation of an irreducible interiority that is not to be fully divulged by any of the poem's machines. The poem's satirical position toward its

subject matter is similarly reserved: it energetically associates itself with this social situation while through the irony of bathos refusing to divulge the motivations of the poetic endeavor itself.<sup>59</sup> The poem cannot describe in clear and certain terms either the positive, productive elements of Belinda's great occasion, or the stultifying and negative elements that would require the condemnation of the *fête*. These are indicated within the poem's satire as thoroughly intertwined, refusing for the reader the possibility of extrapolating from this occasion to produce a theory, or an ethical judgment. *The Rape of the Lock* is a massive mobilization of the ineffability of the Longinian *hypsous*, a depiction of its metamorphic potentialities, and an expression of the satiric dedication to expressing this ineffability while allowing it to remain unnamed and unspoken. For these purposes, Scriblerian satire references an Ovidian poetics to describe the intensities of transformative occasion, an aesthetic strategy that parodies and refuses, for the sake of the preservation of metamorphic sublimity, the stabilizing *anagnorisis* that would allow poet, narrator, characters, or even reader to emerge into the stark contrast of epistemological elaboration. Simultaneous with the decline of Ovid and of the allegorical reading of his *Metamorphoses* to which I alluded at the chapter's opening, the

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<sup>59</sup> As Jonathan Lamb observes, John Dennis was outraged by the poem's lack of moral certainty, pronouncing it empty of both narrative event and moral conclusion. See Lamb "Still Life" 48-9. Lamb suggests that this emptiness described by Dennis was an unconsciously perceptive connection between the poem's objects and the objects of still life painting.

Scriblerians use Ovid's poetics to produce a body of what could be called allegories of the ineffable: repetition of the mobilization of occasion in order to perform the irreducibility of the unknowable element of *différance* that gives writing its life.

## 4. Pe(s)ts and Hosts: *Gulliver's Travels* and the Satiric Critique of Hospitality

### 4.1. Introduction: *The Progress of Satire*

I began the previous chapter with the proposition that, by the early eighteenth-century, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had begun to lose their allegorical significance for their readers and commentators. Texts that took as their task the rewriting of Ovid began to make use of the rhetorical and material features of the poem, rather than their indication of a set of moral truths outside of or beyond the text, and this change in reading practice was embodied particularly well by the poetry of Pope. *The Rape of the Lock* puts these rhetorical and material appropriations to work towards a reflexive consideration about the possibilities of rhetoric, aesthetics, and satire itself as practices of writing's circulation in the world. In this chapter, I will reprise this concern with allegory to argue that Jonathan Swift's great work of satiric travel operates as the most recursively reflexive of the Scriblerians' satiric documents. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is an investigatively allegorical compendium of the possible roles for satire within the practices of social life that the Scriblerians had come to give the label Modern.

The revision of allegorical reading that emerged for the Scriblerians and their contemporaries did not do away with all allegorical modes of reference. Rather, the allegorical concerns seem to have become for a period increasingly reflexive, internalized

to the text and to its role as the productive force of all reference and engagement with the world. And as John Sitter has indicated, the allegorical mode of the *character progress* enjoyed particular prominence in Augustan satirical art and letters. This genre, a holdover from the early modern genre of Theophrastan character, performs, as Sitter notes, “the reduction of identity to career.”<sup>1</sup> Sitter’s account of the character progress points to the way in which this mode of allegory is a primarily satiric one. Poems such as Swift’s “Phyllis, or the Progress of Love,” “The Progress of Beauty,” “The Progress of Marriage,” Hogarth’s *The Rake’s* and *Harlot’s Progresses*, and significant passages of Pope’s moral *Epistles* preserve the mode of allegory in order to generate a satirical irony towards the notion of progress (i.e. towards modernity) and towards the ethical behavior of individuals in the world. In a sense, allegory is a disingenuous template through which satire can be given form, with the most intense of the ambivalence wielded by the satiric progress inevitably leveled at its very generic category. It is not a question of mere sarcasm that would by its disaffiliation make the genre of character progress into a joke, readily equipped with punch line. What is generated by the character progress allegory is a pattern of pessimistic depiction of social *milieux* badly adapted for the humans who live in them, and individuals who are badly adapted for the social *milieux* that entrap them. The allegorical form is a vehicle for disabling allegory, but without the distance and

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<sup>1</sup> John Sitter. *Arguments of Augustan Wit* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9. For the Theophrastan character see Benjamin Boyce’s *The Theophrastan Character in England to 1642* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947).

release enabled by a joke. Instead, progresses like those depicted by Hogarth confine us, refuse us the relief of aesthetic distance, and force us to follow the course of a blooming pessimism that takes account of both the subjective and objective aspects of modern daily life, or career, as Sitter puts it.

The character progress is what Maureen Quilligan would identify as a mode of allegory rather than one of *allegoresis*. Within the process of secularization and explicitation by which allegory became less concerned with its “pretext” as an exterior, metaphysical foundation, allegory became more reflexive in its orientation, more ironic towards the notion of an allegorical pretext. As Quilligan recounts, the notion of allegory identified more strongly with moralistic practices of reference to a pretext is to be aligned with the classical practice of *allegoresis*, in which a quasi-metaphysical relationship between text and commentary gives value to the existence of both. Allegory as such, Quilligan argues, is more properly considered as a genre which modifies this notion of the essential truth existing independently, behind or beyond textual encounters. Allegory as a modern genre is intent on the presence of the sacred within the very textuality—the literality, the linguistic and etymological nature—of its own construction.

The Scriblerians read Ovid to offer a meditation on the sacred that operates through the text’s own most prominent and intense features. In making use of Ovid as allegory, rather than allegorically, the Scriblerians were able to empower their own writing to concern itself *with itself*, as writing. But this is not productive only of a formalist vortex in which all “meaning” is torn apart by the Charybdis of satiric ridicule.

The redoubled reflexivity of Scriblerian satire instead operates to produce a sense that what is sacred, in the face of so much skepticism, is the intensity of the encounter that can occur at the site of the text, between text and reader. In what follows, I will chart the ways in which *Gulliver's Travels*, itself a member of the genre of character progress, performs allegorical reflexivity, and confronts the problem of encounter.

The intensities of allegorical recursion, even those embodied in character progress, are aligned with the skeptical tradition of the “je-ne-sais-quoi” and the sublime, and direct us toward a sacred presence in the text that operates as ineffability, not directly representable, but present through effects of intensity and *kairos*. As I detail in the first chapter, these sophistic, rhetorical, and skeptical aesthetic concerns are not merely operations that point toward either conservatism or nihilism—they have, in their operation, a particular orientation toward aesthetics that we should attempt to articulate more fully and carefully. As Joseph Noggle argues, there is indeed a point on which the skepticism of the Scriblerians comes to rest. But it is not quite the Blumenbergian “zero point” attributed to Rochester by Rose A. Zimbardo. It has a positive content, even if this content operates only obliquely through form and through effect. The Scriblerians in practice situate themselves within the tradition of ineffability that made Boileau’s translation of Longinus so important to French and English letters in the late seventeenth century, a point at which the process of skeptical iconoclasm has not yet banished itself into nihilism. The sacred had long before become, perhaps always had

been, a problem of figuration as such, and Scriblerian satire is concerned deeply with how to generate the sense of the sacred while simultaneously averting its overt figuration, keeping at bay the reification that inevitably occurs when spirit is given visible, or legible, textual form.<sup>2</sup>

So we cannot properly say, as Quilligan does, that the absence of the sacred separates satire from allegory as a genre.<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I will consider perhaps the most significant of the texts that have been historically aligned with Scriblerian satire: Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. I will argue that the distinction between *allegoresis* and allegory allows us to begin to read the satiric text in a way that better isolates and can articulate its concerns with its own textuality, and better expresses the most cohesive and repetitive features of the Scriblerian aesthetic. We will find that despite Quilligan's distinction between irony and allegory in which ironic texts "leave [the reader] hanging with nowhere to go," Swift's satiric narrative involutes as its "nowhere" precisely the problem of its own operation as satire. And if allegory requires the language of a text to

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<sup>2</sup> Here I am aligning Scriblerian satire and its skeptical tendencies with the broad history of iconoclasm toward which W.J.T. Mitchell gestures so compellingly in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), esp. his depiction of the rhetoric of iconoclasm in Burke and Marx and the longue-durée association of this rhetoric with the Enlightenment.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Maureen Quilligan. *The Language of Allegory* (Cornell University Press, 1992), 284ff.

refer to a “pretext” in which it can ground its assertions about the sacred, then it is an opening of the role of the pretext, rather than a nullification of it, that satire such as Swift’s performs. *Gulliver’s Travels* is a meditation on satire itself, a reflexive character progress allegory that operates as a critique of allegory and, as I will observe below, a critique of criticism. What is more, and in distinction from these critiques, it repeatedly depicts the jarring encounters (with texts and with other worlds) in which satire locates the sublime transport that it holds to be a crucial, but endangered, feature of writing.

While *Gulliver’s Travels* is certainly a text whose overt references to (or parodies of) allegory are many, many commentators have also noted that any serious consideration of the text as allegory is limited by what seems to be its ironic stance toward this kind of reading. As is the tendency in Scriblerian satire, a massive mobilization of reference greets the reader, parading allusion in front of us in a way that is too matter-of-fact to be allegory. John Sitter, for example, is not willing to grant that the *Travels* should be firmly considered as a member of the character progress genre precisely because of this vast referential textual complexity. “That work,” he concedes, “is too encyclopedic to be read well as simply the character progress of Gulliver, or, say, as the progress of self-reliance” (40). Just as with the failure of this last label, however, the text fails to be reduced to the parody of, for instance, *Robinson Crusoe* or the writings of Dampier—a progress of self-reliance would perhaps perform such a parody through consistent and less wide-ranging textual allusion. For in Swift’s text, references to the

contemporary take a vast array of forms and play hide-and-seek from behind endless ironic conceits. The text is a pastiche construction of references to other texts: parody, faithful imitation, satiric reference, allegorical reference, and direct commentary. The way these forms ceaselessly blend into each other makes a determination of the standpoint of the text, the perspective of its author, an almost absurd task—indeed, the very one that the text rejects. *Gulliver's Travels* is an intensification of satire's ability to have its cake and eat it, too. It slips from our critical grasp like a Protean fish if we try to determine its position or its allegorical significance. At the same time, however, its Protean forms are not merely formal—examples of a postmodern “free play,” for instance. They have particular resonance for readers, and cannot be discarded in the name of a reduction of the text's communication to that revealed by an analysis of form.

But if we accept that there is no purely formal version of satire at work in *Gulliver's Travels*, no transcendental signified behind its crowd of referential strategies, what still has not been fully described by critics is how in its literary afterlives *Gulliver's Travels* has flown by the nets of its own thorough contemporaneity and become “Literature.” What is there in the text that is not encompassed by reference? I propose to add to the analysis of the text's satiric function by bringing forward a set of the text's concerns that, while thoroughly entangled in reference, begin to articulate Swift's and the text's interest in more abstract articulations. Reading phenomenologically not for the transcendental formal truth of the text, but for the more abstract commonalities that

emerge from its very depiction of reference and entanglement, can allow us to see that it is a text thoroughly concerned with satire itself as a problem, a genre, and a way of relating to the world. In what follows I will focus on the ways in which the *Travels* is, allegorically, a text *about* satire, and about the question of how satire should relate to its others, which is to say, the referential masses that otherwise populate Swift's text.

Following the aesthetic emphases of Scriblerian satire described in the first chapter (translation, imitation, transport), it turns out that here, too, the problems of satire are problems of encounter. But I would caution that even this level of abstraction—to say that the text is “about” encounter—is misleading in its apparent establishment of an autonomous meaning or aim for the text, something “behind” the satiric functions. As I articulated in the first two chapters, Scriblerian satire is given life by a performance of entanglement, or, to recall the distinction I made with regard to McKeon's history, the implicit entwining of aesthetic and social relations. Here, as I introduce the topic of encounter, I must assert that this is at best only allowed a hypothetical status by Swift's slippery text. To isolate an abstraction from Gulliver's *Travels* as a formal element of its concern, or an allegorical content-behind-the-form, is to read the text poorly, or not at all. *Encounter*, as an example of an abstract thematic concept, is never cleanly abstract in the *Travels*. So we must not put much faith in this mode of reading as one that will pin down the text, find its truth, and establish more clearly its position in the canon of literary history. Instead, I only promise to produce a

hypothesis about the satiric text that will help us to produce a theory concerning its energies, its aesthetic orientation, and its resistances. While in one sense it is perhaps a signal of critical defeat to admit that one acts toward the text as it would seem to wish a reader to act, I maintain here, as I have throughout, that there are aesthetic lessons offered by Scriblerian satire that literary history as such has yet to either fully articulate or put into practice.

The text certainly gives us *encounters*, whether parodic, satiric, cynical, or realistic in their orientation. Each of the text's four parts is an episode in which travel produces variously unsettling meetings between Gulliver and varied strangers. And while we might say that the role of the strangers is to make Gulliver strange to himself, and to make ourselves strange to ourselves, this unified aesthetic task seems to be a reductive categorization in the face of the variety and prominence of the text's many scenes of encounter. Likewise, defamiliarization is too general to account for all of the aesthetic features of Swift's satiric encounters. It is certainly a prominent feature and effect of the text, but this effect is also one that characterizes the aesthetic task of literary writing in general, a feature of literary language articulated in the twentieth century by the "Russian formalists."<sup>4</sup> I will take the encounters phenomenologically, here, and examine

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<sup>4</sup> The canonical reference for this notion is Viktor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, eds and trans. *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3-24.

them without the *telos* of defamiliarization in order to question the relation between the aesthetics of satire and the repeated function of encounter within Gulliver's *Travels*.

Reading the *Travels* with an eye toward their affiliation with the genre of character progress opens up the ways in which the text's encounters articulate hospitality as their most prominent textual concern.

#### **4.2. The Lilliputian Puppet Show**

A vast mass of mankind are degradably thrown into the background of the human picture, to bring forward, with greater glare, the puppet show of state and aristocracy

--Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*

Gulliver's life as professional and Englishman is momentarily ripped apart by the rock on which *The Swallow* breaks, and he crawls towards us onto our shore as a kind of *tabula rasa*. His roles as ship's doctor and as the self-identified Nottinghamshire-born, "third of five sons" who, unable to find himself at home in his career and life, had left his newly married wife in order to resurrect his personal finances at sea, have become essentially irrelevant. We had been prepared for his stories of encounter by his account of his general tendencies upon landing on sea islands and foreign ports. His

ethnographic and scientific distance is presented as an act of character witness, establishing for us Gulliver's due scientific diligence, capacity for learning, and ethical commitment to objectivity. "My Hours of Leisure I spent... when I was ashore observing the Manners and Dispositions of the People, as well as learning their Language, wherein I had a great Facility by the strength of my memory."<sup>5</sup> Even this rendition of the travel narrative's claim for veracity functions ambivalently here—neither pure parody nor pure assertion, it leaves us to puzzle over whether, and how, we are to judge Gulliver as narrator. The text's tendency toward ambivalent statements such as this has led to the distinctions between the "hard" and "soft" "schools" of scholarship that dominated criticism of the text from the 1950s to the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

Is Swift's "parody" of travel narrative and scientific narration a negation, a rejection of this kind of writing? What we find, rather, is that the satiric imitation is both dependent on and autonomous from those forms of writing on which it feeds. It is inextricably tangled and tied with these parodied modes. But this does not become a dialectic in which the negated element is made palatable to the critical self by means of

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<sup>5</sup>For accessibility I use the Penguin edition of the travels here, edited by Robert Demaria, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 22. The Penguin text uses the 1726 Motte edition of the *Travels*. Hereafter cited in the text as *GT*.

<sup>6</sup> For a useful overview of these critical battles, see James L. Clifford. "Gulliver's Fourth Voyage: 'Hard' and 'Soft' Schools of Interpretation." In *Quick Springs of Sense: Studies in the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Larry S. Champion. (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1974). 33-49.

the so-called negation of the negation. We will see that no such process of progressive self-education occurs here within satire's mode of relation to its textual others. The ambivalence, in other words, of the satiric character progress never leaves us, never allows us to decide whether Gulliver is a "reliable narrator," or whether his near-quotation of Dampier could nevertheless contribute to the text in ways not encompassed by parody.

Likewise, after *The Swallow* breaks apart, and Gulliver, ejected by the sea, wakes from his sleep, he finds himself tied to the earth, tangled with the surface from which he would normally rise. What follows is at first a less than human encounter—the encounter of the sensation of a parasite making its way upon the body. "In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left Leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my Chin" (GT 23). With this descriptive focus on sensation, the text suspends itself in the phenomenology of the moment: we do not yet understand that Gulliver is describing a meeting. We have an encounter, but cannot yet recognize with whom: man, beast, or absolute other. The clarification that follows this sensation of inhuman movement upon Gulliver's body, once he catches sight of his Lilliputian captors, allows the uncanny resolution of human shapes to relieve us from the tension of a possible encounter with an exotic beast. Gulliver's immediate reaction (again, productive for us of some ambivalent knowledge of his character) is to roar violently, ridding his body of the now human forms. He is apparently revolted by the demands

such a presence makes on his body, demands that extend from what at first seemed to be a parasitical relationship to those represented by a relation of hospitality, of welcome presence. Gulliver is unwilling to become either kind of host in these initial moments.

The words "*Hekinah Degul*" are the first of the strangers' sounds that Gulliver transcribes for us, and are left untranslated (oddly so—in a text full of the display of Gulliver's eventual mastery of translation). Gulliver wants nothing more than to break his bonds in the face of this uncanny spectacle of untranslatable, miniature humanity. Freeing his left arm, his first action—is to *seize them*. Their arrows repulse him, allowing the escape of those that had been near him. This act of violent seizure will later be narrated by Gulliver as opening to the most dominating of relations between humankind and reviled animal pest. Seized by the Brobdignagian farmer, Gulliver recounts: "I apprehended every Moment that he would dash me against the Ground, as we usually do any little hateful Animal which we have a mind to destroy" (GT 83). But it goes unexplained, here. The encounter with the small, human-featured Lilliputians has left Gulliver bewildered and fiercely defensive.

The first half of the scene is then an apparent encounter between a human (whom we know to be so through the claims to humanity implicit in the act of narration) and a crowd of bestial forms that are gradually coming to be thought of by our narrator as human. This process is accelerated by the production of a stage, on which a long speech is presented by a figure "who seemed to be a Person of Quality" who "acted

every part of an Orator" (GT 25). This oration communicates nothing, in a literal sense, but Gulliver is clearly moved by it to consider what he had not considered until this point: making gestures of submission and need. The oration's power indicated by this shift in our narrator's approach is that of a sublimity of station, one that is neither strange to Gulliver (he identifies it as "Quality") nor hidden by the barriers of language. The production, performed on the makeshift stage near Gulliver's face, communicates the grandeur of *spectacle*. Gulliver is neither fully won over by this grandiloquence, but neither is he unaffected, and his change of tactic shows it. His attempt to communicate and satisfy his own hunger indicates that he has returned into a consideration of himself as linguistic subject, engaged in an interaction in which *something* might be communicated. Rather than trying to kill the tiny person of eminence, Gulliver identifies with the spectacle of Quality that he performs, and with the position made subject by that quality.

Gulliver's entrance into the exchange, however, intensifies and makes explicit his relationship to the person of eminence. Immediately, through Gulliver's request for food, he himself becomes an ambivalently witting and willing *part* of the spectacle of grandeur. This entanglement is achieved by way of hospitality. Very quickly we find the tables reversed—instead of an unknown parasite on the body of a *tabula rasa*, we now see Gulliver becoming himself a guest whose as-yet unfathomed hunger places him in the constant debt of his hosts. Gulliver reveals to us, however, that this spectacle of

hospitality had been planned in advance: “above an hundred of the Inhabitants mounted, and walked towards my Mouth, laden with Baskets full of Meat, which had been provided, and sent thither by the King’s Orders upon the first Intelligence he received of me” (GT 25). Here Gulliver reveals to us a certain political cynicism, so that the great oration and its ensuing scene of massive hospitality turn out to have been less than spontaneous.<sup>7</sup> And the spectacle is far beyond the bounds of hospitality even for a royal visit. Festive hospitality for foreign dignitaries had become a thing of nostalgic myth by the early eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> A reader is certainly most likely to experience

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<sup>7</sup> This distinction will prove very important as we consider the elaboration of the question of satire’s relation to hospitality. The pathos of the scene is quite limited because of Gulliver’s size and the power it always holds in reserve, and the encounter does not seem to threaten to become a situation in which we might feel for Gulliver as the vulnerable outsider, bereft of everything including his own language. For Derrida, “[a]mong the serious problems we are dealing with here is that of the foreigner who, inept at speaking the language, always risks being without defense before the law of the country that welcomes or expels him; the foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the state, the father, etc.” (Jacques Derrida. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000], 15. Hereafter cited in the text as *H.*). Nearly all of these terms are technically accurate for Gulliver’s entry into Lilliput, but the text deflects our concern for Gulliver—in part because he himself seems so little upset by the encounter. This turn away from pathos is significant—just as, within the text as a whole, there is no true example of ideal hospitality, there is likewise no true example of the indigent stranger, utterly pathetic in the depths of his defenselessness. Gulliver’s entrance as defenseless vermin into Brobdingnag is colored by our own understanding of his power in this relation to the Lilliputians and the *ex post facto* nature of the narration—we know the adventurer returns from his experience with the other. But it is also colored by his willingness in each case to become something other than a foreigner—to find a place within the new relations that greet him.

<sup>8</sup> Felicity Heal notes the dwindling productions of cities and towns directed at royal visits. By the eighteenth century, such hospitality was part of the myth of a feudal past at best. See her *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1990), 307-8. Hereafter cited in the text as Heal.

such a massive production of welcome as an utter exception. And we are asked to notice and identify with consumption of this spectacle: those who watch Gulliver endlessly devour their supplied feast display “a thousand Marks of wonder and astonishment at my Bulk and Appetite” (GT 25). Gulliver perceives that the popular perception of his drinking and eating is that they are “Wonders” (GT 26), displays of uncanny or preternatural capacity. The astonishment at the wonders presented to them brings the crowd together as crowd—that is, it amasses their bodies, perceptions, and responses.<sup>9</sup> They cry in unison, but this response provokes an odd reaction in Gulliver, a violent turn that yet again goes unexplained.

Unless we consider Gulliver’s admission of the temptation of violence against the crowd of Lilliputians (now humanized by both their hospitable endeavors as well as their clear affective responses to his virile displays of consumption) as continuing in the pattern of disgust directed at vermin, we are left perhaps unable to identify with his narration here. It is another prominent moment in which an ambivalent judgment seems

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<sup>9</sup> I am thinking here of the many great nineteenth-century texts on “the crowd” such as those by Le Bon, Tarde, and later, Freud, that offer the emergence of crowd formations as a new kind of social being and relation to the ego. Swift himself has much to say about crowds in *A Tale of a Tub*, in a very real sense anticipating many of these later works. See Gustave Le Bon. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1960); Gabriel de Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation* (Gloucester, Mass: P. Smith, 1962); Sigmund Freud. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Trans. James Strachey (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922).

to be taking place, one that may communicate to us something of the character of our narrator. Gulliver tells us that

I confess I was often tempted, while they were passing backwards and forwards on my Body to seize Forty or Fifty of the first that came in my reach, and dash them against the Ground. But the remembrance of what I had felt, which probably might not be the worst they could do, and the Promise of Honour I made them, for so I interpreted my submissive Behaviour, soon drove out these Imaginations. (*GT 26*)

Again, this disgust takes place as a revulsion against the presence of vermin on his body—the presence of a parasite, an invader. What we find as Gulliver represses this violent urge (and is thereby able to enter Lilliputian society) is that he now interprets his submission as a contract. But he also adds one final contractual obligation here, a binding debt that seems to be more objective in its requirement of the repression of violence: “Beside, I now consider’d my self as bound by the Laws of Hospitality to a People who had treated me with so much Expence and Magnificence” (*GT 26*).

I have wandered here in trying to depict what I think are important allegorical possibilities within the opening encounters of Book 1. With this statement of Gulliver’s submission to the Laws of Hospitality I’ve finally reached a point that allows me to make a tentative synthesis of what I have so far recounted. In this encounter between

Gulliver and the Lilliputians, and in the parallel encounters that follow in all four books of the text, the questions of hospitality, obligation, and submission are emphasized. This emphasis operates as an avenue for the reader not only to consider Gulliver's (or a traveler's) obligations and liberties within the spaces of colonial or pre-colonial encounter. For Gulliver is allowed to become neither a pure travelling observer (as his depiction of his ethnographic tics might have us believe); nor is he allowed to become an "everyman" figure to whom our identification is bound by the text's encouragement. Instead, what Swift has done with Gulliver is to make him into the emblem or figure of satire itself, which is to say, a thoroughly uneasy and ambivalent navigation of the world through writing, a "zero point" or empty center that resists all easy judgment, identification, and definition, yet remains open and inviting to such judgment. This role for Gulliver is underwritten by, or operates in parallel with, the ways in which hospitality operates throughout his voyages.

Jacques Derrida describes the antinomy of hospitality well, illustrating what are in essence the two modes of the "law of hospitality" that also encompass Gulliver in his encounters in the *Travels*. The law of hospitality requires both a universal and a particular "moment" (although Derrida removes temporality and thus the possibility that this relation might be taken for a dialectic by calling this a "moment without moment" [H, 81]). Hospitality takes place across the incommensurability of these moments of its law—its expression as a universal law, an absolute hospitality that can

only be betrayed by instantiations or particularities, and its expression in a particular set of laws, its instantiation in particular legalities that exist in the world and necessarily betray the notion of an abstract and universal law. *Gulliver's Travels* span the divide of this antinomy, moving back and forth across its chasm, finding one foothold which is then erased by another. Gulliver operates as a figure for satire's reception in the world, and its relation to the antinomies of the law of hospitality.

Our era's critical inability to decide on Gulliver's reliability, the extent to which he is a satirist satirized, stems from this skeptical empowerment of Gulliver as narrator, his persistent movement from one edge of the antinomy to the other. Like Scriblerus, Gulliver is *in effect* the animation of satire itself, a virtual embodiment of the role of satire in relation to its hosts and guests. But as we see in these opening encounters, the possibilities for satire in its encounter with others (other bodies, other individualities, and other texts) are far from settled. *Gulliver's Travels* is a navigation through the possibilities of satire's relation to the world, a character progress that, were we inclined to produce a Hogarthian title, we might call "the progress of satire." It is a tale of the traps and misuses to which satire can fall and be put, and it is finally a performance of the one necessary aspect of satiric writing, for the Scriblerians: satire's ability to maintain ambivalence toward all roles, all obligations, and all final judgments, even as it also refuses to abandon its attempts to engage with the world. Satire is neither the nothingness of negation, nor the positivity of an identification. It is the fluctuation of

these two processes, always operating as a resistance to both positivity and negativity—  
an eternal production of ambivalence.

In Lilliput, the coordinates of the journey through worldly negations and identifications to satiric ambivalence are those of hospitality and spectacle. Gulliver's reception of hospitality is thoroughly appropriated by the art of political spectacle, so that even as he becomes the guest of the Lilliputians, he also becomes the tool of political factions (against his professed wishes) that each seek to have the population see his power and capacity as an element of their own operation.<sup>10</sup> At first it is the King and his emissaries who have used the "Laws of Hospitality" to capture Gulliver within the operations of political spectacle. These coordinates allow us to ask questions of the role of satire: is satire a parasite on the body of the work that it references? In this, Swift's text anticipates the question that Jacques Derrida identifies as thoroughly entangled with any prospect of hospitality: "How can we distinguish between a guest and a

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<sup>10</sup> Louis I. Bredvold's essay "The Gloom of the Tory Satirists" sums up the general rhetorical position toward faction shared by Swift and his political and aesthetic allies. "A political party—that is, the party one was opposed to—was a faction seeking to disrupt the national unity. To give up one's neutrality and become a party man, even with the right party, was in a sense a sacrifice of moral position and justifiable only because the nation was in danger." In Part 1, Gulliver seeks to navigate away from faction by serving what he perceives to be national interest, finding only that faction is already there preceding him. See the essay in *Pope and His Contemporaries: Essays Presented to George Sherburn*. ed. James L. Clifford and Louis A. Landa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 7. For a candid expression of Swift's depiction of faction see his *Sentiments of a Church of England Man* in *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, Vol 1: A Tale of a Tub with Other Early Works*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 24. In his *Discourse of the Contests and Dissentions* in the same volume (229) Swift depicts the strife caused by faction as a component of a political "Sickness unto Death." This volume will be cited hereafter in the body of my discussion as *PW*.

parasite?" (H 59). And in fact, *Gulliver's Travels* is thoroughly preoccupied with this difficulty. Does satire find itself obligated to submit to the sovereign power of its host? What kind of submission would allow satire to remain activated as a continuing process of navigation? How does satire risk being used as (political) spectacle, and how does it properly resist this appropriation?

The new perception that what he has submitted to is the Laws of Hospitality transforms Gulliver's still-violent fantasies of power. He considers, in retrospect, that at his discovery his hosts could have attempted to kill him while he slept. "I should certainly have awaked with the first sense of Smart, which might so far have roused my Rage and Strength, as to have enabled me to break the Strings wherewith I was tied; after which , as they were not able to make Resistance, so they could expect no Mercy" (GT 27-8). His imagination of power is tied to an imagination of "Liberty," an object he never ceases to request throughout his sojourn in Lilliput (and a figure that returns at the end of the Brobdingnagian captivity of Part 2). We are to think here of course of English or British liberty, the most commonplace of England's eighteenth century nationalist rhetoric of identity.<sup>11</sup> But embedded in this scene in which both hospitality

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<sup>11</sup> For a good, broad historical account of British liberty, see Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), especially the discussion of Wilkes, where the earlier, latent national character of liberty is focused in a quasi-populist xenophobia in the 1760s (105-116). Colley describes the political uses to which public spectacle was put on election day on p. 51.

and a political subjection (Gulliver as tool for political spectacle) are established, the request for liberty that Gulliver makes to the representative of the King is directed at what is felt by Gulliver to be a binding hospitality, a hospitality that has been mobilized for other ends than for his own sake. The fantasy with which Gulliver associates liberty is, however, not much more attractive to us: his wish to be able to once again see the common Lilliputians, their crowds, as vermin, and to show them “no Mercy,” is hardly an attractive model of hospitality in its own right. Here we have the figure of satire caught between a violent hatred of servitude, a resentment of the debts of hospitable obligation, and a wish to assert its power in the act of real negation, remaking the world according to its disgust with the situation it has been given. Felicity Heal notes that within early modern hospitable relations, the guest could assert a kind of power that played on the host’s vulnerabilities *as* host. “The guest, by abusing his role, could reverse the power relationship that was implicit in the giving of hospitality, and could reveal the weakness of the host who exposed himself through generosity and openness” (Heal 149). Gulliver does not pursue this possibility, but certainly readers are to see in his temptations towards it this reversal implicit within hospitality. He is seduced into an acceptance of his submission, and chooses this possibility rather than breach the reciprocal relations into which he has entered.

The liberty that Gulliver finally receives embeds him even further within the production of political spectacle. The “Articles” offered the *Man-Mountain* (a phrase both

manipulatively flattering and, when emphasized in his narrative, a sign of Gulliver's boastful pride) act to legislate his utility for use by both the King/Emperor and the rival factions of government. This production of spectacle had already been significantly intensified while Gulliver was not yet at "liberty" by a set of grand occasions produced by the court in their treatment of their guest. The Emperor had made a great event of his approach to Gulliver, advancing ceremoniously but unnecessarily on horseback, ordering his retinue to feed and quench the chained stranger's hunger and thirst. The very feeding of Gulliver is by necessity a spectacle, requiring the parade of "a sort of Vehicles on Wheels" stuffed with the food he will eat (in what will no doubt seem, to the Lilliputians, in addition to its unimaginable quantity, a monstrous haste). The Emperor's "Priests and Lawyers" are present at this scene to make their own addresses to the newcomer.

Most striking, however, and of significance for the political effects of this production, is Gulliver's reaction to the unruly crowd, who in what the narrative describes as their indiscipline are unable to prevent themselves from shooting arrows at him. The perpetrators of this disorder are "seized" by the Colonel (i.e. the master of ceremonies), and are given to Gulliver, placed "bound into [his] Hands" (GT 32). Just as he has fantasized, Gulliver now has defenseless Lilliputians in his grasp, and seems to be at least offered the license to show "no Mercy" if it pleases him. But wrapped in the imperial spectacle, Gulliver cannot undertake such an action. He gives us no indication

of the reason for his leniency. Gathered in the arms of the spectacle, Gulliver has become a subject to its rhetorical production of imperial majesty, military order, and legal and religious wisdom. He finds himself asked, in the donation of these unruly commoners, to add to the strength of the spectacle—in a sense, he is here interpellated by its recognition of him as a worthy actor. He is also welcomed into a “liberty” of action whose frame of possibility is delimited by the political expediency of every publicly visible gesture.

Given this entanglement within political spectacle, Gulliver the guest has no choice but to spend his liberty in a manner that will not offend his hosts. The alternative would be to identify with the unruly and common crowd that he has repeatedly imagined, even in the midst of their exceptional donations, as vermin to be destroyed. Satire, we might say, finds itself put to use by power, engaged in the aesthetic reinforcement of the grand ceremonies of government, and is figured as being caught in a structure of hospitality that requires that it do so. Gulliver acts with a new softness after being given the role of executioner. “[L]ooking mildly... I set him gently on the Ground, and away he ran” (*GT 32*). This is immediately resituated in terms of its spectacular effects: “I treated the rest in the same manner, taking them one by one out of my Pocket, and I observed both the Soldiers and the People were highly obliged at this Mark of my Clemency, which was represented very much to my Advantage at Court” (*GT 32*).

The articles of liberty function to route all of Gulliver's free behavior into paths that will lead to political utility for those in power, and those vying within power. Couched as indications of the government's concern with the safety of the population, they also establish procedures by which this concern with safety can be transformed into ceremony. "He shall not presume to come into our Metropolis, without our express Order; at which time the Inhabitants shall have two Hours warning to keep within their Doors" (GT 43). How useful and concerned the government can be, even as it shows itself to have entirely made a submissive and legally-bound subject out of the *Man-Mountain*. For Gulliver, this liberty has entailed further servitude, even as his "Chains were immediately unlocked" (GT 44). Gulliver's limited freedom of motion is predicated on a contractual obligation to support the government's ability to enact itself through spectacle. Within this configuration, it turns out that, even before the encounter between Gulliver and the Lilliputians took place, it was already staged within this struggle between the government and the populace. Hospitality, as decreed by the government, operates to draw attention to the public face of power through its performance of largesse, especially when faced with the challenge of the *Man-Mountain*. If we are to consider Gulliver as an emblematic figure for satire, we can begin to consider that Gulliver's sojourn in Lilliput is predicated on the swelling of the self-importance of satiric writing, its interpellation into political subjectivity through a seductive flattery. If satire is a *Man-Mountain* faced with the occasion of encounter with people miniature by

comparison, it has acquired this sublimity by means of the role it has taken on for official and factional vectors of power. The power that satire can serve inflates it, making ceremonious its great capacity for consumption, phallic endowment (see *GT 42* for the grand military procession that passes admiringly under the holes in colossal Gulliver's breeches), and even defecation. Satire has, in other words, *always already met with co-optation*, so that it has already become entangled with power, even faction. Any pretense of purity is either another element of the ceremonious spectacle of grandeur allowed to satiric writing by those who fund it, or it means taking up a position with the people against some identified target of misused power.

This last possibility is clearly derided by the encounters of Part 1. The people are vermin to Gulliver, and their safety is only guaranteed by the interests of the government. Why is it that Scriblerian satire cannot find it possible to identify with the position of the "rabble" (*GT 32*), that it in fact situates itself in opposition to populist politics? The difference between the crowds of gawkers and the grandiloquence of political ceremony resides in the status accorded rhetoric in each situation. Gulliver's treatment from the position of sovereignty makes it clear that for the Lilliputian ruler all rhetorical effect, all of the ability of writing and speech to *transport* their audience, must have as the basis of its operation the *telos* of sovereignty itself. In contrast to this, the popular crowds so despicable to Gulliver (and to Swift and Pope elsewhere) offer *no function for rhetoric* at all. Sublimity as it exists for Swift (in its emergence from Boileau's

translation of Longinus from the Greek in the late seventeenth century) requires a certain semi-autonomous space, a certain license from political power in order for its performances to find a stage.<sup>12</sup> The transport that Longinus assigns to sublime oratory, and which contributed to the Scriblerians' understanding of the possibilities of writing, occurs in the crowd as "Astonishment" and "Wonder," which turn out to have been only reactive affects to staged spectacles. Longinian "transport," in which shared linguistic exchange is predicated on the intensity of occasion, and thus on the rhetorical production of *events*, requires a position neither aligned with power nor with popular sentiment, but inevitably attached to both. The crowd's wonder and astonishment (or its unruly resistance to military, legal, or priestly order) operate to maintain the crowd *as crowd*. *Gulliver's Travels* proposes that they are less total capitulations to the spectacle presented than they are ways of fending off complete submission, a form of resistance peculiar to masses.<sup>13</sup> From the perspective of satire, both the masses and the seat of

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<sup>12</sup> See Jonathan Lamb's wonderful essay "Longinus, the Dialectic, and the Practice of Mastery" in which he mounts a critique of the association between the Longinian sublime and the Hegelian dialectic, especially in terms of the sublime's relation to power. *ELH* 60:3, 545-567.

<sup>13</sup> For a provocative theorization of the active forms of resistance exhibited by crowds and masses, see Jean Baudrillard's *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or, the End of the Social, and Other Essays* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), in which he depicts a general massification of a "silent majority" that is fundamentally resistant to knowledge, codification, stratification, etc. Practices of advertising, statistics, polling, sociology, demography—all are attempts by the State to fully capture this mass that has sprung into being in modernity. All of these methods, according to Baudrillard, fundamentally fail—the dark cloud of the mass can only be captured at its edges, at its most translucent and reflective points: its silver lining. The masses are both a dark density and a reflective luminosity—" [t]he masses, on the contrary, accept everything and redirect everything *en bloc* into the spectacular, without requiring any other code, without requiring any

power (including its concomitant factions) are thoroughly, and unacceptably, self-interested.

But Gulliver is self-interested as well—as I propose above, no one escapes this text unscathed. It is not pure selflessness that seems to drive him from Lilliput and Blefescu, but an individualist mobility that preserves a sort of “liberty.” But this liberty is not *merely* the British ideologeme that, as Linda Colley has described, cathects desires onto the empire.<sup>14</sup> By means of the tale of encounter and, ultimately, release (or escape) with which we are presented in Part 1, we understand that what Gulliver seeks can be articulated in its opposition to the spectacular hospitality offered to placate the masses and to inculcate his own subjection. What Gulliver wants is to navigate the world free of the experience of parasitism, whether it is his own parasitic dependence upon a host who willingly capitalizes on that debt (a mutual parasitism?), or the parasitic operations of the masses of Lillputians whose relation to Gulliver is reoriented toward their own

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meaning, ultimately without resistance, but making everything slide into an indeterminate sphere which is not even that of non-sense, but that of overall manipulation/fascination” (43-4). This is to say that the power of the mass, the mode in which it functions as a resistance, is its deterritorialization of the coding aimed at encompassing it, the transformation of this manipulation into a spectacular that cannot be made sensible. It is through the *hyper*-compliance with power that

the masses are a form of resistance.

<sup>14</sup> See Colley’s chapter on “Peripheries” in *Britons*, pp. 101-132.

resistances to discipline. The “desire” of satire is, in other words, for a hospitality that is not always already staged as manipulative spectacle—a relation to its others that might not result in primarily an aggrandizement of the satirist or the power with which the satire is aligned.

Here, I propose that Swift is attempting to articulate a concern about the *economic* relations of the hospitality that encapsulates satire. Freud articulates something very close to this in his analysis of the joke and its relation to hospitality, especially to gift-giving. For Freud, the joke operates as a gift exchange that requires not two but three parties—satire partakes of this structure to a significant extent, although its indirection and ambivalence mean that its function is more complex than that of the joke (which Freud shows to be itself a very complex relation). Freud proposes that “the psychological process of the joke is consummated between the first person, the 'I', and the third, the person from outside.”<sup>15</sup> The third person, who has no proper place in the relationship between persons one and two, receives the joke as a gratuitous donation. “The psychological process in the listener, in the joke's third person, can scarcely be more aptly characterized than by emphasizing that he purchases the pleasure of the joke with a very small expenditure of his own. He is made a present of it, as it were” (*Joke* 143). In the relation between satire, political power, and reader, the exchange produces an economy

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<sup>15</sup> See Sigmund Freud. *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious*, 143. Hereafter cited in the text as *Joke*.

of accumulation for the power that licenses and appropriates satiric writing, or a debt of allegiance for the reader. Instead of offering the reader (or, standing in for a reader, the people of Lilliput) a gift exchange in which satire requires no reciprocity, no response of a donation of allegiance, worship, or respect, the conjunction of satire with the license provided by political power operates within the rhetoric of hospitality while only conferring obligation. Satire must burden itself with the need to escape this role if it is to find a way to operate within a less economic form of exchange. To find its liberty, economic and political, satire cannot ally itself with faction, and attempts to remain affiliated with the central power instead of biased faction reveal the fact that faction already exists at the site of sovereignty. Gulliver and satire have to leave aside all such affiliations in order to maintain a properly ethical relationship with their “others.”

### **4.3. Satire the Pe(s)t**

In Brobdingnag, the text offers a series of meditations on hospitality that center on the roles of pests and pets, and the transition between these two positions. Gulliver at first imagines the massive difference in scale in terms of the *Odyssey's* scene of the inhospitable encounter with the Cyclops. Gulliver hides himself from those giants he thinks of from the start as “monsters,” projecting onto them the aggression of

Polyphemus as they stride across their demesnes. Gulliver's capture reveals his status to be objectively similar to that of Odysseus—the giants identify him, and he sees himself, as a pest, as vermin, as a parasite. Gulliver internalizes this status quickly—he cowers not merely because of the vulnerability of his miniscule size, but because he apprehends that he seems to be a pest to the farmers, an unwelcome guest. "I apprehended every Moment that he would dash me against the Ground, as we usually do any little hateful Animal which we have a mind to destroy" (GT 83). Gulliver's supplication to the farmer cannot therefore become instantly translated into political spectacle—instead, it is the supplication of a vermin toward the possibility of its domestication, the equivalent of an apparently "friendly" pest whose geniality toward humans makes it suitable for being tamed. The text depicts the process by which domestication is apprehended by the Brobdignagians, as the farmer's wife "screamed and ran back as Women in England do at the Sight of a Toad or Spider" before determining that the little *splacknuck* Gulliver is not merely a pest. Gulliver represents, in Part 2, a pe(s)t, by which parenthetically interrupted term I mean to indicate the process by which a pest, or parasite, becomes domesticated, brought into a certain kind of hospitality, and reconfigured as pet.

This process of domestication works in two directions. Gulliver is ostensibly "tamed," which is to say, acculturated in that limited way that a subaltern species is acculturated to domestic life in pethood. But the domestic perception is for a moment altered, as what would normally excite revulsion is made familiar, brought into the fold

of hospitality. Just as with the text's concern in Part 1 that swelling the head of satire, so to speak, makes it susceptible to political manipulation, here it is satire's vulnerability to a domestication that looks and feels to some extent like the accession to a position of status and centrality to social life, but which is limited by the subalterneity of a pet, which is to say, a kind of writing that cannot be granted real and serious concern about the social life in which it is immersed. If satire's wild exteriority towards the human scene is nevertheless colored by its incomplete revulsion, its conflicted desire to be both exterior and included, this ambivalence makes it particularly vulnerable to a kind of domestication that disables it. Gulliver's transition from pest to pet is an allegorical anxiety over the possibility that satire is to be forced to traverse this very path.

Thus the most apparent and prominent satiric feature of the chapter, Gulliver's repeated expression of disgust made possible by his diminished perspective, is a redirected form of satiric externality, an attempt to achieve critical externality from within a position of diminutive entrapment. Its expression as critique is hampered by the immersion, so that no one can share Gulliver's antipathy toward the revealed horrors of the human body. Except, that is, for the reader, who can feel disgusted at the "truth" of human sexual, medical, and excremental revelations. This offers the reader a kind of return of repressed bodily function, but not much distance from these revelations, so that what seems to operate as satiric defamiliarization fails to circulate beyond a kind of momentary revulsion, or in its most extended circulation takes the

form of self-loathing. This self-loathing, and the disgust that produces it, is indicative of the *deformed* operation of satire from within the position of submissive yet resentful domesticity of Gulliver the pet. If satire falls into domestication, its energies of disgust can only be motivated by *ressentiment*, and fail to produce the externalizing distance that satire needs in order to maintain itself and its role as critical writing. Gulliver as pe(s)t illustrates the muffling of the effect of satiric disgust, opening up the corpuscular only as a kind of stifled redirection of satiric excoriation into *ressentiment*.

The resentments come in large part from Gulliver's enforced performances as marvel or wonder for the gawking crowds. He is made to perform mechanically in a spectacle that mimics the human (or Brobdignagian), but the performance clearly resonates with the assertion that Gulliver is *not* human—the wonder is that there could be such a human pet. It's not hard to see that this performance, entertaining or laboring for human status but always falling short, resonates with slavery and the slave trade in domestic servants. Srinivas Aravamudan writes of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or, The Royal Slave* in terms of that tale's heroic and royalist title character's struggle with the domesticating forces of slavery, only perhaps to succumb to the domesticating features of the narrator's textual desire. Aravamudan notes that "Africans seized for the slave trade were also transported to England and sold as pets and domestic servants" in the

period preceding the 1772 Somerset decision.<sup>16</sup> The narrator of Behn's tale "caresses" this recalcitrant object of trade, performing a second-order domestication predicated on the nobility and power of Oroonoko's struggle to resist submitting fully to the dehumanized status of slavery. The story of the "pet-king" and his demise thus dramatizes the domesticating influence of the caress, operating first as an empathetic restitution to the dehumanizing effects of slavery, but nevertheless encompassing the rehumanized subject within what Aravamudan calls an "honorary subjectivity" (44). From the arc of Behn's narrative, Aravamudan postulates that

[p]ets, once acquired and privatized, can be suspended from their earlier participation in the public sphere as objects, taking on an honorary subjectivity. The initial status of the pet subject is honorary, or virtualized, because it depends on the contingent and fetishized investment of the owner. The owner's disinvestment returns the pet to the identity of an objective commodity in the marketplace. (44)

This virtual subjectivity, which operates in the state of exception made possible by a grace or donation—an act of giving, of the gift—may or may not ask its beneficiary to make good on the debt incurred. This account of Oroonoko's enslavement and

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<sup>16</sup> Srinivas Aravamudan. *Tropicopolitans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 34. Hereafter cited in the text. For the Somerset case and its historical context, see Stephen M. Wise. *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial that Led to the End of Human Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005).

subsequent emplotment allows us to take note, however, of the double maneuver being depicted in both that text and in *Gulliver's Travels*. The pet is "acquired" and then "privatized," the second a separate intensification of the first act of appropriation of an already tamed individual. Gulliver's sojourn in Brobdingnag is marked by a division between these two moments—Gulliver's status as laborer for the mercenary gain of the farmer is followed by his reception of the royal donation of honorary status in the household and at the table of the King and Queen. Gulliver's domestication is fulfilled or completed as he takes on the status of honorary subject whose well-being is now fetishized as that kind of care which we lavish on pets.<sup>17</sup> Gulliver's acceptance into royal company is predicated not on his worth but on the need for a fetish through which the performance of the largesse of care, grooming, and sympathy allows the Brobdingnagians to reassert their prerogative and to redirect their sympathetic behaviors away from each other toward an object of display.

Gulliver the pet is thus, as a fetish, a conduit through which human subjectivity exerts both its distance from the animal world and its predication on hospitality and hospitable relations with others. Hospitality towards the pet is a staged and "virtual" hospitality in its separation off from social relations—humans can relate to each other

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<sup>17</sup> For the historical context of animal ethics and pet ownership, see Keith Thomas. *Man and the Natural World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), esp Ch 3.

through the act of hospitable generosity and care towards the pet, but this does not produce or ensure generous and hospitable relations directed elsewhere.

Glumdalclitch's hospitality is a prime example of this staging—Gulliver persistently describes Glumdalclitch as caring, generous, and kind, the only Brobdingnagian who displays such unmixed care and adulation towards him. The caring attention of the child only reinforces the distance between Gulliver and a real intervention in social life—the adults are no more likely to treat Gulliver as anything but a living doll, or pet, given his benefactor's age and maturity. Gulliver necessarily begins to identify with this virtual and donated subjectivity, expressing deep affection for Glumdalclitch's display of sympathy towards her pet (*GT* 91) and resentment at his greatest competitor for the petty hospitality of the royal family, the queen's Dwarf (*GT* 102-3; 108).

Gulliver's subjectification into pethood is brought to its culmination in his great oratorical performance, in which he is asked to account for himself (and his country) by the Brobdingnagian king. Speaking from within this interpellation, the little domesticated man puffs himself up to his maximum grandeur in order to give the effect of autonomous largesse to his countrymen, and by extension, himself. The king reductively shrugs this off, refusing to allow Gulliver to take the form of anything other than a diminutive demi-human in his estimation, and likewise judging the Britons by means of this association: "I cannot but conclude the Bulk of your Natives to be the

most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth" (GT 123).

While Swift allows the perspective of the king to serve as a satirical vision, here, and we cannot help but feel perturbed by the defamiliarizing effects of Gulliver's discourse on gunpowder (GT 124). The progress of satire-as-pe(s)t depicted in the Brobdingnag episode is one in which a too-domesticating license has brought satire's perspective into the fold of established order, so that satire can only produce a critical discourse that supplicates itself to the power it serves, refusing except through periodic tics of disgust to find fault with that position. What is more, satire's version of critique within this domestication is one that can only be uttered as ventriloquized by the sovereign moral perspective. The satirist must bow to a superior moral position in order to produce, through this supplication to a higher morality, a critical distance between itself and its object. In this affinity with an ideal, Swift's tale is arguing, satire negates itself and the positive effects of its own position. Gulliver's Brobdingnagian pe(s)thood is a process by which satire transitions from a status of verminous irritant to a status of supplicating pet. But this transition finds satire again thoroughly evacuated for itself, allowing only the voice of the morally ideal to operate, refusing itself anything but the most morally pure doctrinal judgment to hold sway. While this form of judgment is perhaps *closer* to the mode of operation that Scriblerian satire apparently wishes to promote than that of mercenary attachment to faction or political spectacle, it refuses

something which for satire is as crucial as its morally corrective idealism. When Gulliver expresses his baffled incomprehension at the Brobdingnagian king's failure to accept the gift of the secret of gunpowder, we can glimpse something of an expression of what remains unrepresented by satire in its pe(s)thood. Gulliver's shock that a "Prince possessed of every Quality which procures Veneration, Love and Esteem" would fail to immediately grasp an opportunity to make him "absolute Master" over his enemies (*GT* 125), betrays the distance that exists between his own ethical standpoint (which here represents also that of his countrymen and their cultural heritage) and that of the ideal, effectively satirizing himself for us as an individual blind to his own cultural biases. But if the ideal is to become the only vehicle for satiric perspective, *only negation can take place*. Gulliver expresses surprise in part because he is blind to his own deficiencies, and in part because the perspective of the ideal that shows him to be deficient does not explain how, or show how these deficiencies might be transformed or overcome. When the satiric voice is that of the master, the ideal, then the effect of satire is only negation, and the individual writer can only become that of a domesticated vessel whose own identity is made worthless and of no import to the transaction taking place. It is not that the king is a tyrant, here—it is that pe(s)thood does not do justice to the position of the satirist within the very tradition or culture that he takes as his topic. If only the voice of the ideal is allowed to speak, satire becomes a rigid denunciation in which subjectification becomes only a constantly recursive process of becoming pe(s)t, a

domesticated subjectivity with only the mastery embodied in the ideal to credit for its ethical achievements.

#### **4.4. A Critical Interlude**

While satire can become, instead of a celebrated and welcome guest, a part of political spectacle or a domesticated pest, it must avoid a further possibility that may seem, *prima facie*, to offer greater power or influence on matters political. This possibility is, throughout the third part of the travels, flirted with but never accepted, and in his fourth travel, Gulliver settles on a role towards his hosts that turns out to be too close to this possibility. The potential role for satire to take, guest as it is, is that of the parasitic *critic*. Criticism is the path that satire refuses, in this allegorical consideration of its ethical responsibility. Through its attention to the ethical dimensions of hospitality, *Gulliver's Travels* serves as an extended attempt to consider the ways in which satire might prevent itself from becoming criticism.

The role of critic is villainized widely in Scriblerian writing as a form of unpardonable enthusiasm, a pathological relationship between writer and world that must not be allowed to proliferate. Criticism as embodied by "moderns" Bentley and Wotton is identified as the malaise of modernity in Swift's *The Battle of the Books*. Pope's *Essay on Criticism* derides narrowly affiliated and self-serving criticism, and his *Dunciad Variorum* ventriloquizes the words of the critics in order to ridicule the nature of their

interventions. Perhaps most strikingly, the cant of criticism is considered in *A Tale of a Tub* as the narrator digresses into a consideration of the problems of hospitality a critic incurs when he has worn out his welcome. This “allegory that parodies allegories” mock-heroically identifies the critic’s task as that of the monster-slaying mythic hero.<sup>18</sup>

The narrator observes that

It hath been objected, that those antient Heroes, famous for their combating so many Giants, and Dragons, and Robbers, were in their own Persons a greater Nuisance to Mankind than any of those Monsters they subdued: and therefore to render their Observations more compleat, when all *other* Vermin were destroyed, should in Conscience have concluded with the same Justice upon Themselves.

(PW I.57)

Critics make bad guests—if they act heroically in ridding their hosts of a plague of monsters or vermin, they fail to avoid becoming themselves just such a problem. The trouble with critics seems to be in part that they turn on their hosts. Howard Weinbrot notices that the danger implied in *The Battle of the Books* involves just such an ungrateful response. The modern critics are represented as overtaken with an enthusiasm for

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<sup>18</sup> The quoted phrase is Claude Rawson’s, from his *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 56. Hereafter cited in the text as *GR*.

levelling—for bringing the heights of Parnassus down to their level.<sup>19</sup> Here is a place where we might easily chart the politics of Scriblerian satire. The echoes of the Civil War are unmistakable here. The *Battle* represents leveling as a divinely-inspired enthusiastic fit that would destroy the achievements of civilized culture in the name of an overblown selfishness, a project of transforming all into radically protestant, enthusiastic, modern self. It is this emphasis on the figure of enthusiasm that no doubt resulted in the *Tale* and *Battle* being mistaken for works by the author of *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. But instead of Shaftesbury's suggestion of ridicule's power to divest enthusiastic preaching of its threat of disorder, the *Tale* and *Battle* offer a more concerned image of the mad moderns, ridiculing them, but depicting their inspiration as one that does not so easily fall susceptible to simple ridicule.<sup>20</sup> The critic has become, in a sense, the new embodiment of a figure such as Winstanley, a leveller in the landscape of culture.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Weinbrot notes that "[i]nappropriate elevation is one of the connecting themes between the *Battle* and the *Tale*." See his *Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 185. Hereafter cited as *MSR*. I use the words "levelling" and "levellers" with two ells because this is the way they were used in its seventeenth-century moment both by critics and by members of groups who appropriated these words for their own political and religious goals.

<sup>20</sup> See Shaftesbury's *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to my Lord \*\*\*\*\** in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. ed. Laurence E. Klein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4-28.

<sup>21</sup> For Winstanley and the levellers, see Christopher Hill. *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 107-150.

The *Battle's* spider makes use of some of this self-inflating enthusiasm as it argues that its foe the bee is a parasite who cannot produce works of and from the self. Aesop's interpretation of the spider and bee aligns the former with "satyr and wrangling," "which, however they pretend to spit wholly out of themselves is improved by the same arts, by feeding on the insects and vermin of the age" (*PW*, I.151). The spider's own claim that the bee's parasitic productions lack *sui generis* originality is turned on its head. Aesop's partisan interpretation of this animal fable provides just enough impetus to spark the combat. Neither side is willing to accept the identification of itself as parasite. Neither side wants to be labeled "critic," but it is the moderns to whose aid the goddess Criticism comes, the moderns whose projection of a leveled Parnassus starts the war. Aesop's moralization of the animal fable (his forte, of course) is depicted as partisan, but its opinion of the moderns is not far from that offered by the text in general.

The spider's production is thus parasitical dependency that represents itself as innovation. The critic makes a kind of perverse claim to bring his words out of his own self, but what the animal fable shows regarding production is that *neither* side can be said to be properly autopoietic. The bee's products, highlighted by the spider, are themselves the result of dependency. But the dependent bee offers a graceful return for the hospitality of nature. The "sweetness and light" identified by Aesop are in contrast to the venomous, disgusting dependencies of the spider's relations with nature. Satire,

we might say, offers, in its refusal of the modern, critical position, a return for the hospitality it enjoys that critics cannot.<sup>22</sup>

I agree with Howard Weinbrot that the *Tale*, *Battle*, and the *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* work in a certain unison to construct an image of a set of abuses, none exclusive from the others. Through these accounts, Swift “enlarges upon the danger of self-destructively seeking complex new falsity instead of simple old truths; he shows how that restless innovation in religion and in learning are products of the same modern putative freedom that really is tyrannical” (MSR 161). But this tyranny of the modern is figured consistently as an abuse of hospitality, and it is upon the nexus of satire’s entanglement with hospitality that *Gulliver’s Travels* mediates. How can satire work to remain ethically attuned to hospitality? How can satire, to put it perhaps too cloyingly and reductively, but borrowing from the *Battle*, produce from its dependencies a kind of sweetness and light?

To put this question in the terms of the discussion of the aesthetics of Scriblerian imitation from the first chapter, we might ask how without the power of criticism satire can produce an aesthetics of the sublime, an experience of the text that shows the

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<sup>22</sup> Reading the *Battle* with an attunement to a significant contemporary depiction of a parasitic economy, Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*, we might be tempted to see the profession of criticism as a part of the shadow economy of parasitism that Mandeville thinks well-meaning Christian citizens hypocritically disavow. Immoral parasites “convert to their own use the labor/of their good-natur’d heedless neighbour”. See Bernard Mandeville. *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* Vol 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Classics, 1988), 19.

occasion of the satiric attack to involve a sublime sense of transport that has in effect brought into being and into subjective awareness both the satirist and his satire.

Weinbrot proposes that Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, in its difference from the royalist bias of Boileau's *Art Poétique*, in effect operates as a satire on both the assumptions of Boileau's treatise and its form, offering a more skeptically aligned *Essay* in place of a definition of *Art* (MSR 217). Pope offers a model of poetic (and English) liberty in place of prescription and servile imitation. But for Pope, the proper critic acts with liberty not in the interests of an innovation based on the announcement and aggrandizement of a self (an authorial identity)—for Pope, this is precisely the act of the parasitic critic who, like Boileau, attaches himself to party, faction, or king in order to further his career.

Swift's narrator in the *Tale* describes the critic as he "who is indeed careful as he can, to watch diligently, and spy out the filth in his way, not that he is curious to observe the colour and complexion of the ordure, or take its Dimensions, much less to be padling in, or tasting it: But only with a Design to come out as cleanly as he may" (PWI.56). In Pope's *Dunciad*, the critic has abandoned this penchant for cleanliness, instead sportively wallowing in the same mire that Swift describes in the *Tale*. But Pope's apocalypse of Dulness describes a world in which the tables are turned—cleanliness is next to irrelevance, and ordure is the medium through which the commerce of the publishing trade flows. Without such a millenarian perspective on the present state of wit, Swift offers the critic who keeps himself attached in order to keep himself clean. In *A Trritical*

*Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind*, Swift mixes the prospect of cleanliness with the animal metaphor from the *Battle*: Critics are “at Best, but the Drones of the Learned World, who devour the Honey, and will not work themselves” (PWI.249). Clean and clear of muck and work, the critic is parasitical, sycophantic, opportunistic, and ungrateful. The satirist, then, must therefore be none of these things.

Lee Morrissey explicitly links British literary criticism with the enthusiasts of radical democracy from the period of the Civil War. In *The Constitution of Literature* his thesis is that the critical definition of the act of reading shared, at mid-seventeenth century, a concern for radically democratizing the experience of the text.<sup>23</sup> Critics who followed, and who make up the moment Habermas calls the emergence of the public sphere, were, for Morrissey, oriented toward retrenching the democratic aspects of reading, and, as though fearful of the cultural instability of the Civil War and Interregnum, stabilizing the enthusiastic possibilities of the moment when reader meets text. We might be tempted to see the Scriblerians' protest against critics and criticism as a primarily conservative effort to control, or a partisan effort to slow Whig ascendancy in the early Walpole years. But for the Scriblerians the enthusiasm of criticism is not

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<sup>23</sup> Lee Morrissey. *The Constitution of Literature: Literacy, Democracy, and Early English literary Criticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), esp Chs 2 and 3.

simply a threat to ordered hierarchy within the realm of letters. While the conservatism is indeed often present, and seems often to function as a motivation, its own skeptical position towards aesthetics forces the implications of the text to elude and exceed the Tory boundaries of Swift and Pope's ties to the opposition. The excesses of Scriblerian satire as they are materialized in *Gulliver's Travels* take the form of a skeptical critique of hospitality.

Satire for the Scriblerians is then the negotiation of the possibility of hospitality within the encounter of reading. *Gulliver's Travels* depicts the varying resistances, abuses, and difficulties involved in the act of this negotiation. The satiric writer must fend off appropriation, domestication, and, as we see in Part 3, modernization. In Part 4, we are faced with a situation in which Gulliver, unable to accept his species identity with the Yahoos, capitulates to his captors in a way that the text treats with some mild but significant irony. Turning on his British origins, Gulliver identifies with his Master Houyhnhnm and becomes critic of one culture and partisan to another. Given the reluctance the text displays towards partisan alignment in Part 1, this can seem like no solution to the reader. In what follows I briefly account for the difficulties of becoming modern exhibited by Part 3, before moving on to comment on the troubles of becoming a critic with which we are left in Part 4. The text's pessimistic ending suggests that a satiric aesthetics can be satisfied with no home-bound model of hospitality, and the reader is left with the text's unfulfilled desire for hospitable encounter that had never managed to

emerge. Claude Rawson argues of Swift's general tendency to depict "figures of enclosure," "little worlds made cunningly, nested boxes" that "[t]he suggestion of enclosure, it might be added, tends in satire, and especially in Swift, to become that of a vast incriminating net rather than that of a beautiful home" (GR 91). This *unheimlich* process of failure of hospitable encapsulation operates with an accompanying but inarticulate hope to provide the impetus for *Gulliver's Travels*.

#### **4.5. Inhospitable Moderns**

Gulliver's third voyage is the most easily aligned with a kind of Tory conservatism that neatly chooses the ancients over the moderns, persistently showing the latter to be vain, neurotic, corrupt, and dangerously self-inflated. Gulliver finds science to be a modern enthusiasm *par excellence*, its institutionalization resulting in impassioned projects that are blown by the bellows of zealous inspiration into a dangerous flame, or a fatal inspiration. Contrasting with modern science is the responsible husbandry of Munodi, a figure who embodies the text's nostalgia for a feudally-organized governance that would root itself in tradition and imitation. Modernity has threatened to tear up Munodi's orderly traditionalism by its roots, leaving him

doubt[ing] he must throw down his Houses in Town and Country, to rebuild them after the present Mode, destroy all his Plantations, and cast others in such a

Form as modern Usage required, and give the same Directions to all his Tenants, unless he would submit to incur the Censure of Pride, Singularity, Affectation, Ignorance, Caprice, and perhaps increase His Majesty's Displeasure (*GT* 165).

Munodi's republican virtue is closely aligned both historically and here in the text with hospitality. Indeed, hospitality is one of the most prominent of the elements of the nostalgic tale of republicanism's demise, both in the years of Bolingbroke and the opposition to Walpole's Whigs, and afterwards into the Romantic era and texts such as Wordsworth's poems in *Lyrical Ballads*. The feudal estate, founded on the principles of an ancient *ius hospitii*, provided in this nostalgic view a hierarchical chain of personal affiliations that was disentangled and depersonalized by the centralization of governance and economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>24</sup> Here, in the *Travels*, centralization has brought with it an enthusiasm for utopian reform, unleashing a horde of speculating projectors on the stable milieu of the country estate who wish to reshape everything in the name of an empty but fervent progress.

Munodi is the only significant figure in Laputa who acknowledges Gulliver with attentiveness, refusing the flappers who attend and remind all other male members of the court. His apparently welcoming respect for Gulliver (*GT* 163) seems to form a bond

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<sup>24</sup> See Heal, pp. 124-149. Her account also takes into consideration the rise of Methodism and Calvinism and the ensuing devaluation of the charitable act of giving.

of mutual admiration between the two men—Gulliver clearly sees himself as a figure deserving of such hospitable treatment, and complains that otherwise, “[a]lthough I cannot say that I was ill treated in this Island, yet I must confess I thought myself too much neglected, not without some degree of contempt” (GT 162). The Laputans’ two inspiring spirits, mathematics and music, leave them mentally casting about, lost in abstract thought in a way that necessarily refuses to acknowledge the particulars and individualities of experience. Similarly, the scientists of the Academy fail to acknowledge particularities in the name of hypothesis—what we would today call, in its failure to properly address specificity, theory. Munodi has not caught this modern fervor, preferring a traditionalist’s imitation of classical rules, and a feudal lord’s ethical responsibility to order and oversee his dominions with care. Gulliver shows us that this ethical attunement has been rejected in the name of theory and centralization, and as a result of the negation of the republican respect for hierarchy and descent, the caprice of fashion has been unleashed to further disorder the whole. In this nostalgic moment of the complaint of hospitality lost, we see that one of the difficulties of modernity, for Gulliver and perhaps for Swift, is that it *refuses to accept* hospitality—hospitality cannot find a value that would not ultimately devalue it and nullify its effects. Munodi’s marginalization as the recalcitrant ancient, and especially the fact that, as Gulliver notes, there was “no third Companion” (GT 165) at Munodi’s welcoming dinner table, make the point for us that hospitality itself is precisely what is not welcome in modernity. The

overcoding system of scientific and governmental projection has successfully absolved a once feudal aristocracy of its commitments, and in an effort to reinforce this transformation, has in effect devalued all attempts to recapture a past hospitality.

To avoid seeming to align myself with this nostalgic tale, I have to assert that Swift's book, even in this brief glimpse of a positive content, does not rest on nostalgia or the fantasy of republican retirement. Munodi's relationship to the past is utterly stagnant, refusing even that imitative production of differences that we find at work in the Augustan literary version of classicism, the formal imitation. "[H]e was content to go on in the old Forms, to live in the Houses his Ancestors had built, and Act as they did in every part of Life without Innovation" (*GT* 166). This stasis, predicated on simple cultural reproduction, is precisely what Gulliver, our figure of satire, has been unable to produce in his own life. While some of the impetus for his travels rests on simple economic need (and thus implies an economic criticism of modern individualism for its failures of provision), much of the motivation seems to reside in some desire or drive that Gulliver himself cannot adequately explain, a negativity towards his settled and sedentary family life that would seem to be too restless for a figure such as Munodi. Satire does not itself exist merely to reproduce what has come before.

The jarring fact, however, is that Scriblerian satire can look with praise toward a figure such as Munodi whose entire existence is a kind of fundamentalism of classical culture. Gulliver can stop to receive and commend the hospitality of Munodi, but he

inexorably moves on. Like Candide in El Dorado, although less explicit about his reasons, Gulliver cannot rest with the achievement of a utopian stasis. For Gulliver, there is wisdom in the conservative resistance to enthusiastic projection (and thus change), but this resistance on its own does not produce anything with positive content. The solution for Scriblerian satire to the problem of ancients vs. moderns is one in which aesthetic sublimity must remain possible even in an imitative and worshipful relation to a classical past. Finding the self in devotion to antiquity is not productive of the difference that would energize satire. Even though, as Gulliver sees in his Lucianesque dialogue of the dead in Glubbudubdrub, there may have been significant decay or distortion of moral purpose, satire's effect is to make a case for the modern moment, for the present, to indicate that the moment in which satire speaks is one in which the stakes are high, one in which attention must be refocused and reformation readmitted into the heart. Gulliver's *Travels* refuse to allow satire to become merely the nostalgic praise of aristocratic *otium*. Satire in its "progress" here expresses beyond this solution the restlessness of a devotion to sublimity, the requirement that sublime encounter with otherness remain possible. While for us Munodi's hospitality shames the moderns' theoretical projections and shows them to be, as the Academic experiment shows us, propelled by an inspiration of the wrong orifice, the gust from an anal bellows, it fails to suffice as a thoroughly redemptive hospitality. In search of this, propelled by an unfulfilled wish for a hospitality to come, Gulliver moves on.

#### **4.6. On Becoming Critic**

“At last,” begins Gulliver, in the seminal encounter of his fourth journey, “I beheld several Animals in a Field, and one or two of the same kind sitting in Trees. Their shape was very singular, and deformed, which a little discomposed me, so that I lay down behind a Thicket to observe them better” (*GT* 207). Much of great value has been written about the colonial implications of Gulliver’s encounter with the Yahoos and his struggle to articulate a sense of self that can successfully express a difference from what he identifies as their disgusting bestiality. What I will add to the body of concern with Gulliver’s stay with the Houyhnhnms is the argument that, read as the character of personified satiric writing, Gulliver’s transformation in the land of the stoic horses is one by which he assumes the role of the critic, the most vilified character in the pantheon of the Scriblerian mythology. The critic is the figure who has internalized the enthusiasm of modernity. More than even the projector, the critic (often represented, especially in the early works of the group, in the person of Bentley or Wotton) is the figure “who will destroy the human and intellectual past for his own gain” (*MSR* 143). The projecting scientist is forced to make his claims of innovation and progress from a quasi-universal and utopian position. The critic pronounces judgment on learning from a thoroughly individualized position, operating parasitically on the writings of others in the name of

individual credit. If, for the Swift of *A Trritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind* the critics are “at Best, but the Drones of the learned World, who devour the honey, and will not work themselves” (PW I.249), then it is implicit in this position that satire must distance itself significantly and decisively from criticism, producing either its own honey or laboring to replace what it consumes. Faced with the Houyhnhnms’s stoic and rational ethos that would seem to condemn both the Yahoos and the British to the status of vermin, Gulliver accepts this position wholesale and becomes its proselyte, attempting to make himself as clean of the category of human that he can in his advocacy for reason and his revulsion toward animality. Because he can belong to neither side, and because he is set on self-inflation, he operates in Houyhnhnmland as the inhospitable critic, parasitically espousing the Houyhnhnms against their plague of vermin.

If the critic is he who “is as careful as he can, to watch diligently, and spy out the filth in his way... with a design to come out as cleanly as he may” (PW I.56), then Gulliver is reminded of a literalized form of this need for cleanliness early in his encounter with the Yahoos. Having hastily struck one of them with the blunt of his short sword, he has retreated in the face of what is clearly a social response on the part of the group. “[T]hey began to discharge their Excrements on my Head” (GT 208), he complains. Gulliver has made a mistake from which he now learns: the enraged mob will embroil him in their disorder if he acts aggressively toward them. Rejecting and

rejected by the rabble before any encounter can occur, satire progresses to align itself what it determines to be the antithesis of the animalistic crowd.

This disordered, unclean human unruliness is opposed by the rational and oral culture of the clean and ordered Houyhnhnms. Among the Houyhnhnms' many admirable qualities, the discipline of their social affects allows for what resembles an undiminished hospitality. "*Friendship and Benevolence* are the two principal Virtues among the *Houyhnhnms*, and these not confined to particular Objects, but universal to the whole Race. For a Stranger from the remotest Part is equally treated with the nearest Neighbour, and wherever he goes, looks upon himself as at home" (GT 246). Here, Gulliver is referencing the very Law of Hospitality that informs his behavior in his encounter with the Lilliputians.<sup>25</sup> Oriented not merely towards familiar and expected guests but towards the proper treatment of strangers, the notion of a Law of Hospitality was a crucial element of aristocratic ideology that had receded into virtual non-existence by the eighteenth century—into, as I have noted, a component of the republican

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<sup>25</sup> Heal notes that "[t]he idea of a 'law of hospitality,' that is, a clearly formulated series of conventions that dictated particular behavior towards outsiders, is a late arrival in the writing of the early modern period. It seems to depend upon an awareness of the Roman *ius hospitii*, and of the Stoic tradition of natural law, and hence to be a humanist import" (4). The texts which began appearing in the late sixteenth century that formulated the rules of this 'law' also in a sense announced its demise—as these texts began appearing, so too did announcements about the death of hospitality's death—"a rising chorus of laments that hospitality was dead, or at the very least dying" (93). Likewise, Heal notes that increased attention to Cicero and Seneca in the seventeenth century were productive of increased rationalization of individualism and "moral calculus," rather than broader conceptions of hospitality (101).

nostalgia of Bolingbroke and the Tory opposition.<sup>26</sup> The largesse in the relationship between hosts and guest here is entirely one-sided—it will turn out that Gulliver has absolutely nothing that he could offer his hosts, and indeed, they will gradually retreat from their hospitable acceptance of his presence into a demand that he be forced out—a parallel to his treatment in Lilliput, but a movement produced by different forces.<sup>27</sup>

Satire aligns itself with the rational horses against the animalistic rabble, allowing for the powerful defamiliarization of the category ‘human’ that we experience in the fourth voyage. The bathos of human filth is presented as the truth of the animal state of the species, so that any distance from this filth towards cleanliness is depicted as a culturation away from this nature, a metamorphosis of the animal into the rational sublime. The sentiment with which we are left at the text’s end is that this is an impossible formulation—Gulliver has been convinced by the Houyhnhnms that their experiences with the base features of the human animal show the incorrigible absence of

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<sup>26</sup> Heal observes that “[b]y the first decade of the seventeenth century it seems that any writer on society who did not allude, at least *en passant*, to the decay of hospitality, was failing to observe one of the conventions of his genre” (94).

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, looking to the linguistic anthropology of Benveniste, reminds us that the law of hospitality in the absolute sense that is dictated here—in other words, when directed to the stranger in a universal sense—“requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner... but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names” (H 25). The extent to which the Houyhnhnms fall short of the absolute hospitality claimed for them by Gulliver is very important for the text’s allegorical treatment of satire’s progress.

sublimity of the species, and thrust back by the sentence of life among his kind, he lives his days in resentment of their perceived failings. In the process of coming to love his captors and hate his own animal nature, Gulliver comes to enact that kind of critical practice that mobilized more of the Scriblerians' ire than any other. Filled with the enthusiasm of the Houyhnhnms' rejection of the Yahoos, Gulliver internalizes it, condemning persistently his own species for the filth that they manage only to hide with a veneer of posture and clothing (his own clothes baffle the Houyhnhnms, and clearly embody in their way the practice of saying the "thing which is not"). Refusing his own identity with the species he has identified as filthy, Gulliver thinks of himself as the clean one, the hero that the narrator of *A Tale of a Tub* describes as overinflated with his own self-importance to the extent that his continued presence becomes a social problem. Just as with the

Antient Heroes, famous for their combating so many Giants, and Dragons, and Robbers, were in their own Persons, a greater Nuisance to Mankind, than any of those Monsters they subdued; And therefore, to render their Obligations more compleat, when all *other* Vermin were destroyed, should in Conscience have concluded with the same Justice upon themselves. (PWI.57)

So, too, the critic, having performed his work combating the vermin of the world of letters should not wear out his welcome. Indeed, the critic is, for Swift, *he who wears*

*out his welcome*. The hero-critic has this ambivalence already built in—it is in the nature of the critic to make hospitable hosts into wearied and unwilling ones. The critic is a parasite who comes garbed as a hero, offering something new that offers more satisfyingly critical perspective on those he helps to designate enemies. Thus, if hospitality were to be served,

[I]t would be very expedient for the Publick Good of Learning, that every *True Critick*, as soon as he had finished his Task assigned, should immediately deliver himself up to the Ratsbane, or Hemp, or from some convenient Altitude... (PW I.57)

Gulliver operates in his final voyage as just such a hero-critic, offering a critical perspective on the vermin of Houyhnhnmland (the Yahoos) that allows the Houyhnhnms to first consider their extermination, and then to see Gulliver himself as the lingering vermin, best given ratsbane or forced into exile, for the good of the Houyhnhnms' social cohesion.

The horses have debated the question before—in fact, it is “the only Debate which ever happened in that Country” —“whether the *Yahoos* should be exterminated from the Face of the Earth” (GT 249). But this time there is a difference: Gulliver's Master Houyhnhnm has engaged the Grand Assembly with the prospect of a Yahoo who has all of the traits of a Houyhnhnm. Gulliver comes to the assembly in this virtual way with a

solution: castration of the Yahoos. The prospect of making geldings of the brutish beasts operates for us to continue the defamiliarizing perspective on human viciousness toward animals that Gulliver had introduced in his early conversations with his Master. It also works to associate the Yahoos more strongly with animals, offering a more “humane” solution than that of the genocide desired by many Houyhnhnms. We do not find out whether Gulliver successfully reduces the call for genocide by encouraging, through his countrymen’s example, the castration of the animal humans. But this moment aligns Gulliver with the other heroes who arrive to offer solutions to pernicious plagues or infestation—Hercules, the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Successful or not, this new perspective on the Yahoos allows them to be seen as working animals, as animals bred for labor. The question of genocide had not drawn any of its reasons from this fact—instead, a list of petty grievances are offered that explain why the Yahoos are no better than vermin. “That, as the *Yahoos* were the most filthy, noisome, and deformed Animal which Nature ever produced, so they were the most restive and indocible, mischievous and malicious” (GT 249). They are a population of undomesticable animals that have been unfortunately brought into the rudiments of domestication, subsisting in a kind of borderland existence between savagery and civilization. Barely suitable for any kind of service, the Yahoos are utterly without value for the horses, and if released into the wildness of their non-domesticated state, would represent nothing but a threat to the Houyhnhnms, parasitical at best, thoroughly

despicable and wretched, and demanding destruction. The valences of this discussion that parallel questions of human slaves in the Americas are unmistakable—indeed, a similar logic is used by Jefferson later in the century to assert that if slaves were to be freed, they would necessarily need to be sent away so as to not operate as a threat to social stability.<sup>28</sup> Gulliver’s depiction of the Yahoos, presented by his proxy at the congress, reinvents them as primarily animals who can and will work, and who would be made “tractable and fitter for Use” by gelding. Promoting a solution that would result in their population’s dwindling, and gradual replacement with animals who would even more properly accept the role of laborer, Gulliver offers the Houyhnhnms a rationale for genocide even stronger than the list of petty complaints (suckling the cows’ teats, trampling oats and grasses, killing cats) that were all their endless debate seems to have been able to generate. Gulliver essentially provides the Houyhnhnms with the Lilliputians’ eventual inhospitable determination towards his presence in that kingdom (in which they had decided to blind him and starve him until he wasted away into death (GT 67-8). As work animals who fail at the purpose they have been given, the only thing that gives them value, the Yahoos are doubly deserving of a rationally organized depopulation that will systematically reduce their numbers *and* extract their labor until their end.

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<sup>28</sup> See especially Jefferson’s *Autobiography* in *Writings* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 44.

None of this fits with Gulliver's depiction of Houyhnhnm hospitality, but it is not clear merely from the antinomy of their absolute hospitality and their hatred for the Yahoos that some kind of judgment is being offered by the text, some kind of irony that would ask us to judge the Houyhnhnms according to the positions of the "hard" or "soft" schools. The pettiness of the complaints casts the shadow of irony on the proceedings. And the fact that Gulliver's Master Houyhnhnm, who throughout the tale speaks to Gulliver as the representative of the logic of Houyhnhnm culture, has approved of the prospect of systematic castration indicates that it is not at all antithetical to Houyhnhnm custom or thought. But regardless of the question of the text's judgment toward the hospitality given to Yahoos, we are faced with the fact that the Houyhnhnms begin to consider Gulliver to be only a Yahoo, and therefore not worthy of the hospitality he has been receiving. Gulliver has exceeded his welcome—he has come to change the Houyhnhnms' perspective on the Yahoos, and in doing so they have had to consider the boundaries of their self-definition. This self-questioning has by time made them defensive: paranoiacally, they begin to fantasize Gulliver's rational gifts as potentially revolutionary—horrifyingly so. "It was to be feared, I would be able to seduce [the Yahoos] into the woody and mountainous Parts of the Country, and bring them in Troops by Night to destroy the *Houyhnhnms'* Cattle" (GT 256). "So it is the indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage—and who really always has been" (H 123). Gulliver has brought the supplementation of

conscious self-categorization to his hosts, but in so doing becomes thoroughly pernicious, only parasitical in his further presence with his hosts. He is the critic who has outlived his utility and who remains, attempting to remain ingratiated while nevertheless operating as a sign of hostility inside of hospitable social relations.

The critic Gulliver attempts his ingratiating maneuvers by thoroughly rejecting and critiquing his former identity—his status as human has come to seem to him to be a badge of dishonor, and so here we get the most savage and thorough excoriation of British culture, from its treatment of animals in the domicile to its treatment of colonial others at its peripheries. Gulliver as critic must thoroughly denounce one identity in order to affiliate himself with another. But this is an effort that has ceased to be of service to the hosts—beyond the initial critique of the Yahoos Gulliver's presence allows, he offers no return for their hospitality. The critic—the writer who, like Bentley, Wotton, Dennis or others, pronounces judgment on the works of others in order to further only his own critical career—is the figure who has, from the Scriblerian perspective, always already exceeded his welcome. Devaluing even the heroic act that the critic performs—refiguring whatever the critic initially may offer as a kind of necessary evil at best—the critique of criticism offered from the perspective of this progress of satire demands that criticism be evaluated according to the question of hospitality.

The critic is the ungrateful guest who, not perceiving his host's displeasure, remains as a hostile force in the house of the host, transforming the space of hospitality

into a space always burdened by a threat or a nuisance. Satire rejects criticism, as it does modernity, domestication, and faction, on the grounds of its failure of hospitality. While criticism may, in a sense, bring us to ourselves, or help to define the enveloping space in which hospitality occurs, *Gulliver's Travels* refuses to accept that the practice of critical judgment can preserve the hospitable possibilities it unleashes. Satire must not accept its role as that of criticism. To do so would introduce excess parasitism and violate the law of hospitality.

#### **4.7. Conclusion: Swift as Anglican and Ovidian Divine**

Swift rewrote the Ovidian tale of Baucis and in 1706, lending to the parable of hospitality an institutionally Anglican religious conclusion that should not surprise us—practically, Swift's Anglicanism stands behind his satire as a fallback position, a solution of compromise that Swift thought was better than the alternative of total protestant deinstitutionalization.<sup>29</sup> Similar to the Hebrew story of Lot's daughters and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, "The Story of Baucis and Philemon" is a depiction

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<sup>29</sup> For an extended discussion of Swift's tendency toward Anglican fideism, see Warren Montag. *The Unthinkable Swift: The Spontaneous Philosophy of a Church of England Man* (New York: Verso, 1994). Montag's philosophical and biographical argument is astute, but I find his extension of the facts of biography to the way we must encounter the text today—as limited by the institution of the church, and as thought that had failed to reach the skeptical heights offered by Spinoza—far too reductive. Here I offer a glimpse at a general position that would see Montag's analyses of Swift to be less damning than their author does.

of an example of properly righteous hospitality that persists despite its utter minority, surrounded by a world of wickedness. Instead of the Greek gods of Ovid's Roman *Metamorphoses*, or the angels of the *Book of Genesis*, Swift includes two human "saints" who come to judge the hospitable and inhospitable. Refused hospitality in every instance, the saints find welcome at the door of Baucis and Philemon. This elderly couple welcomes the two into their home, offering the travelers the finest that they have, asking nothing of them in return. Hospitality is, after all, a quintessentially metamorphic operation—Felicity Heal's historical account explains that "[t]he gate or door was the transitional structure that stood between the general territory of the stranger and the particular environment of the household. To cross it was to undertake the crucial transmutation from stranger (even if known) into guest (Heal 8). Only after this initial transformation from stranger to guest, and the hosts' donation of their kindness does the welcoming pair suspect the holiness of their visitors—an illustration of the selflessness of their largesse.

Swift's jaunty octosyllabic tale differs from the standard translations of Ovid such as that of Garth, Addison and company, Sandys' seventeenth-century translation (1626), or the translation that had held preeminence for nearly a century prior, that of Arthur Golding (1567). Swift lavishes his poetic attention on the transformations of the tale. As the home of Baucis and Philemon is transformed into a church, what takes only several lines in both Dryden's (from the Garth edition) and Golding's translation takes

over sixty here for Swift. The wonders of metamorphosis are displayed for us like a modern-day special-effects scene, extended so that we can gawk at the changes undergone by the humble abode. And the scene is far more “Englished” in its cultural detail than any of the other translations. Swift describes how

The Ballads pasted round the Wall,  
Of Chivy-chase, and English Mall,  
Fair Rosamond, and Robin Hood,  
The little Children in the Wood,  
Enlarg'd in Picture, Size and Letter  
And painted, lookt abundance better  
And now the Heraldry describe  
Of a Churchwarden or a Tribe.<sup>30</sup>

This transformation is uneasily comic—the phrase “look’t abundance better” casts the glance of cultured aesthetic taste around the room in a poem that seems ill at ease with any judgment that fails to praise humble simplicity. But most striking is the replacement of the solemn ending of the poem, which in the other major translations tells us of the couple’s desire to pass away together, at the same time.

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<sup>30</sup> “The Story of Baucis and Philemon” in *The Poems of Jonathan Swift. Volume 1*. ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 93.117-124. Hereafter cited in the text as *PS*.

We beg one hour of death, that neither she  
With widow's tears may live to bury me,  
Nor weeping I, with wither'd arms may bear  
My breathless *Baucis* to the sepulcher.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of this request for a life to be ended without mourning—in a sense, the exact opposite of the difficulties faced by Antigone in *Oedipus at Colonus*, unable because of Oedipus' wishes to know the whereabouts of her father's tomb, described by Derrida as "a sort of infinite time" (*H* 93) of mourning without end. Baucis and Philemon, for Dryden, wish to dwell in the new temple without facing solitude, knowing that, while alive, they will each remain in the presence of the other. Neither will ever mourn the other—that is what their hospitality has earned them, unexpectedly—a gift of death without mourning, without solitude—the ability to die together, with another, to experience their final transformations in each other's arms. In Swift's version, the entirety of this wish is dispelled, and only Baucis—Philemon does not return to our view— speaks of a desire after the house has become a church. He asks that since

You've rais'd a Church here in a minute,  
And I would fain continue in it;

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<sup>31</sup> This is John Dryden's translation. See Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. trans. John Dryden et. al., ed. Samuel Garth (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1998), 271-2.

I'm good for little at my days;  
Make me the Parson if you please.  
He spoke, and presently he feels  
His Grazier's Coat reach down his Heels,  
The Sleeves new border'd with a List;  
Widn'd and gatherd at his Wrist;  
But being old continued just  
As threadbare, and as full of Dust.  
A shambling, awkward Gate he took,  
With a demure dejected Look.  
Talk't of his Off'rings, Tyths, and Dues,  
Could Smoak, and Drink, and read the News;  
Or sell a Goose at the next Toun  
Decently hid beneath his Goun.  
Contrivd to preach his Sermon next  
Chang'd in the Preface and the Text:  
Carry'd it to his Equalls high'r,  
But most obsequious to the Squire.

&c (PS 95.161-181)

This mild satire of the figure of the parson perverts the touching hospitable exchange that other translators have depicted with a degree of reverence. Baucis is deformed rather than transformed, changed to a figure of dusty banality whose life is thoroughly quotidian and servile. In a personal sense, Swift may have found the rhetoric of simplicity and servitude of the Anglicans to be a greater gift than any other—it may be that he would have found this parson’s life to be just, proper, and ethically good. But the rhetoric of this transformation is far more complex than this. The poem proposes that for his utter hospitality Baucis is repaid by emplacement in a hierarchy of deference (to the squire and his “Equalls high’r”) with dusty cowl and hidden goose. It is a comic figure that subverts the Ovidian meditation on hospitality, offering a reward for generosity that cannot be a reward—it means, rather, only a kind of intensified reimmersion into the everyday, rather than the new condition of priesthood and life without mourning.

Swift’s treatment of hospitality in “Baucis and Philemon” expresses a drab ambivalence towards the rewards of hospitality—these rewards are not to be taken to be the justification of the act. Satirizing the dull wishes of the commoner, Swift tells a transformative tale that backs away from treatment of hospitality with solemnity, showing it instead to be an experience of common life, and one at worst no stranger than a country parson. In *Gulliver’s Travels* his meditations on hospitality take on a far more wide-ranging and restless energy because he is there concerned with the endeavor of

writing, and concerned to analyze the possibilities of investment in a writing that would commit itself to holding out for a hospitality that has not yet come. In one sense, Swift certainly seems to have considered the hospitality of the church to be a significant ethical addition to life, whether in England or Ireland. But in another, it is clear that his satire gestures dissatisfied beyond the reach of the church, proposing that through a satiric aesthetics a kind of ethical relationship might be offered that would be true to the universal aspect of the "law of hospitality." The "Story of Baucis and Philemon" says both of these things at once: that Swift considers the church to be a (necessarily insufficient) instantiation of the law of hospitality, and that a more universal perspective towards this law makes the figure of the parson seem to us to be ridiculous in his humdrum docility and dirty rusticity. In his properly satiric texts such as *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift made most prominent use of the latter perspective in order to embody more fully the desire for a more universal ethics of hospitality, and to reject more strongly the insufficiencies of hospitality's materialization in the world.

## 5. Rape, Seduction, and the Fate of the Scriblerian Sublime

In Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest*, the nymph Lodona is pursued by the god Pan in an Ovidian encounter in which pastoral placidity is interrupted by rape and transformation. It is an anxious scene of prolepsis, where the nymph perceives herself endangered by the god's close pursuit:

Now close behind his sounding Steps she hears;  
And now his Shadow reach'd her as she run,  
(His Shadow lengthened by the setting Sun)  
And now his shorter Breath with Sultry Air  
Pants on her Neck, and fans her parting Hair. (191-196)

The movement of intensity dominates the scene, as Pan's lengthening phallic shadow indicates a conjunction of temporalities—the gradual progress of the sun, and the fleeting and intense moments of the chase—that work to produce the intensity of near-contact. We move from the shadow to the pursuer's breath, an indication of the infinitesimal distance between the two figures—a distance that, rather than keeping sexual assault at bay, allows for the uncertainty of the contact between attacker and victim. The expression of lust through Pan's breath ("Sultry Air") that fans and (more imposingly) parts Lodona's hair is a mixture of material contact and ethereal distance

that nevertheless seems to have already performed the act of rape. What more performative utterance can there be than this breath of lust, a rhetorical assertion that asserts so strongly that sexual conquest is urgently imminent? It is the very quintessence of a Longinian *kairos*, the intensification of the present moment through powerful rhetorical assertion.

The urgency of this moment of impending sexual violence stands as a paradigmatic expression of the Scriblerian articulation of the approach of a modern moment, the crucial moment of historical *kairos* that portends wholesale violence toward the scene of literary production. The figure of sexual violence is not an omnipresent one in their writing, but throughout the varied forms of Scriblerian considerations of modernity, the figure of sexual violence is turned round and examined from a number of angles, and in communication with several modes of the representation of this violence in other writing of the historical moment. In what follows I will engage the Scriblerian depiction of intense sexualized encounter, examining its relationship to the Scriblerian aesthetic ethics that I've begun to articulate in previous chapters. As with the assault of Lodona in *Windsor Forest*, encounters of sexualized violence in Scriblerian writing tie together aesthetic and ethical concerns with the encounter between reader and text and the virtual production of social energies in the moment of modernity. More strikingly, the Scriblerian treatment of sexualized violence is bookended by two versions

in the contemporary novel of this treatment or narration that differ significantly in their ethical and aesthetic theory, in the works of Eliza Haywood and of Samuel Richardson.

We have already (Chapter 2) encountered the scene of seduction and sexualized violence in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. There, I suggested that Pope's aesthetic commitments were with the virtualities of the social scene of the poem, so that its gestures towards moralization and satire were troubled by an intense affection for the artifice of virtualized social life. If we are to take seriously the metamorphic and imitative aesthetic and ethical orientations of Scriblerian writing, we must also consider why this virtualization itself nevertheless fails to serve as satire's own apogee, what we might call its "theory"—that feature it might uphold against all modern resistances. But despite the praise for virtuality and commodifying metamorphoses performed in Pope's *Rape*, and the general affinity for the Longinian sublime throughout their writing, the works of the Scriblerians fall far short of a theoretical elaboration of an "antidote" to modernity. Pope's poem itself expresses real ambivalence towards the possibility of a dogmatic lifestyle of virtualization. And despite its palpable investment in a metamorphic quest for the proper function of satire within the frame of writing, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* ultimately expresses what can only be felt as a real pessimism towards that writing. Operating at once by means of a desire for and a persistent impossibility of some resolution of the difficult question of the relation of hospitality between literary text and world, Swift's *Travels* is a satiric adventure clouded by failure, opaque in its

consideration of the ethical concerns about writing that shroud it. Scriblerian satire seems to have already set its own limits, established its own in-built projection of failure—despite the way in which it stages itself as the sole, crucial intervention in modern culture that counteracts a growing Dulness that threatens not the emergence of literature as such but the end of its possibility.

So in order to understand the Scriblerian position on metamorphic and virtualizing artifice, on the transformative potential of their own mode of writing, we must examine the question of the limit of Scriblerian aesthetics. We must in a sense ask the question of satire's advance to its own limit, its relation to a sublime position that remains precisely just below the threshold of those ethical and aesthetic achievement that it would find laudable. Scriblerian satire, in its reflexivity, its performance of a mode of writing that takes as its very concern the ethics of writing, always ultimately borders on what can be mistaken for a purely conservative endeavor precisely because of this relation to an always-posed limit. Always critical in content, it performs a passage to the limit of what writing might become if it is to refuse to take critical negativity as the true aim of aesthetics, and if it is to express that refusal not merely through critical negativity, but through a positive performance of intensity, metamorphosis, *kairos*, and hope. These limits are powerfully explored by the texts we have put into question thus far. The themes of rape, seduction, and sexualized violence in Scriblerian writing allow us to ask the question of how a Scriblerian ethics accounts

for violence, especially directed toward the other, and, perhaps as importantly, the question of how other forms of writing—especially the novel—exceed or fail to attain to the limits set by Scriblerian satire.

It is impossible, in proposing a Scriblerian aesthetic ethics, not to deal precisely with these questions. The most insistent topic on which any notion of a Scriblerian ethics must founder, and thus the very place we need to look for the limits of aesthetic ethics set by Pope, Swift, Gay, and Arbuthnot—the very “Scriblerian sublime” proposed by various critics—is that of gender, misogyny, and sexual violence that so darkly colors Scriblerian representations of alterity. The presence of woman as problematic “other” is a strong one in the most prominent texts of these writers’ collaborative period. These gendered representations of alterity in Scriblerian writing establish pathways through which an ethical openness to alterity might flow—and blockages by which alterity might be refused, constrained, or suppressed. In what follows, I will concern myself with explaining the way in which sexual violence in particular is mobilized in Scriblerian writing as a mode by which literary writing—that is, other representations of such violence in drama and the emerging novel—is critically negated, and another possibility is gestured toward. I will examine the ways in which sexual violence can be understood as a topic of prominence from which the Scriblerians’ distance from writers of their day could be established. To show the limits of the Scriblerian aesthetic ethics, and to consider why these limits function as they do, it is necessary to consider the way rape

and seduction are narrated in the Augustan moment. It is at this site of narrative difficulty—that of the problem of violent crisis—that the early novel operated to perform those energies of suspense and resolution that so captivated readers in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is at this site that the Scriblerians refuse the mode of narrative solution offered by the novel. Like Richardson, Fielding, and others who follow them, the Scriblerians critique the novel of sexual violence and seductive suspense. The manner in which they do so illustrates the difference between the ethical orientation of Scriblerian satire from the later narratives that would become what William B. Warner calls the “elevated novel.”<sup>1</sup> But if the novels of Richardson and Fielding provide a critique of the early works of Haywood and Manley, it is important to articulate the way in which the Scriblerians first mounted such a critique, and through this critique, attempted to produce a variation in form, a mode of narrative representation of sexual violence that would contain both critique of accepted norms and a gesture towards difference. It is to the extent that the Scriblerians fail at this that room is made for Richardson’s great revision of the narrative of sexual violence and suspense at the very end of Pope’s and

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<sup>1</sup> William Beatty Warner. *Licensing Entertainment: the Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (University of California Press, 1998), 11.

Swift's life, in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.

### **5.1. From the *She-Tragedy* to Haywood's *Sexual Sublime***

In 1703 Nicholas Rowe had already provided the entire critique of masculinist ownership of women's bodies that Samuel Richardson is credited for instituting half a century later. Both in direct statements and in the frustrations of the tragic denouement, Rowe's play *The Fair Penitent* asserts that the value ascribed to women's chastity is a supplement that thoroughly subjugates its bearers and impedes the emergence of a more enlightened or progressive social order. As Laura Brown distills in her account of the tendencies of Restoration and early 18<sup>th</sup>-century tragic drama, the figure of the tragic woman becomes over the period gradually more and more passive, less heroic or aristocratic, and more subject to a newly bourgeois devaluation.<sup>2</sup> Rowe's tragic penitent, as an intermediate stage in this development, might thus be understood as an aid to the very process of devaluation that Brown describes. Neither able to gesture towards the fantasy of a phallic female sexuality (as for instance in Behn's *The Rover*) nor able to understand the marriage plot as one of elective affinity (i.e. the bourgeois selection of partners that is no longer subsumed primarily under concerns of hereditary

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, Laura. "The Defenseless Woman and the Development of English Tragedy." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 22.3 (1982): 429-443.

transmission), Rowe's tragedy operates as a critique of aristocratic values without fully articulating the alternatives—only able to look backwards with a nostalgia for courtly love over mercenary concern for dowry and jointure. When Lavinia, in the epilogue, proposes that

You see the tripping dame could find no favor;  
Dearly she paid for breach of good behavior,  
Nor could her loving husband's fondness save her.

...

If you would e'er bring constancy in fashion,  
You men must first begin the reformation.  
Then shall the golden age of love return,  
No turtle for her wand'ring mate shall mourn,  
No foreign charms shall cause domestic strife,  
But ev'ry married man shall toast his wife<sup>3</sup>

her didactic summary serves as a pointed critique of the seductive practices and inconstant sexuality that makes Calista into a victim. But the play's plot also makes clear that it is the extreme fetish of chastity itself that victimizes Calista—we are made to feel

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Rowe. *The Fair Penitent*. ed. Malcolm Goldstein (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 71-2.

the striving against both parental prerogative in nuptial choice, and the absolute determinism of the system of moral value that establishes female reputation in a tight orbit around physical virginity. Calista wants a love match and wedding with her seducer, but is met with Sciolto's absolute paternal disapproval and rake Lothario's unwillingness to reorient his values toward "constancy."

My concern, via Brown and Rowe, with this depiction of the emergence of a bourgeois subjectivity operates as another way of saying, with Ros Ballaster, that "Romance" in its apparition as fiction of amorous intrigue, "absorbs the master narrative of 'history' into the privatized discourse of 'love.'"<sup>4</sup> This is a restatement of that old Lukacsian Marxist commonplace (reformulated so well by Michael McKeon) that "[g]enres provide a conceptual framework for the mediation (if not the 'solution') of intractable problems, a method for rendering such problems intelligible."<sup>5</sup> The "she-tragedy" associated with Rowe is one generic instance in which the political implications of seduction are elaborated in allegorical condensation, one way in which

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<sup>4</sup> Rosalind Ballaster. *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 47. Fiction of "amorous intrigue" is William B. Warner's term, from his essay "Novels on the Market" in John Richetti, ed. *The Cambridge History of English literature, 1660-1780*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 94ff.

<sup>5</sup> Michael McKeon. *The Origins of the English Novel : 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1994), 20.

amatory narrative is able to absorb and re-render history in its political sense.<sup>6</sup> This practice persists in minor yet important ways in the writing of the Scriblerians, from *The Rape of the Lock* to *The Beggar's Opera* to unexpected moments of *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. Between the moment of Rowe's she-tragedy and the reconception of the female tragic heroine in Richardson's *Clarissa*, the Scriblerians produce a satiric transfiguration of the narrative of amorous intrigue that invests seduction and rape plots with reflexive concern about their status as exemplary moments of political allegory.

What the Scriblerians will offer is a satiric and aesthetic difference directed at both the tragic dramatic narrative of the "she-tragedy" and the affective energies of the early novel of seduction, rape, or amorous intrigue. This aesthetic difference is primarily a response to emerging notions of the sublime that move away from those of Longinus and Boileau, the versions of the sublime that the Scriblerians—especially Pope—would favor until the end of their careers. The sublimity and pathos of tragic *peripeteia* operate to fix the effects of aesthetics—those affective "transports" described by Longinus—within epistemology, within recognition.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the novelistic rendition of the "she-

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the political resonance of the plot and characters of Rowe's tragedies, see Vaska Tumir. "She-Tragedy and Its Men: Conflict and Form in *The Orphan* and *The Fair Penitent*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30.3 (1990): 411-428.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2, above.

tragedy” in the amatory plots of Haywood and Manley is a redefinition of the sublime away from peripeteia—in this sense, Haywood’s aesthetic foundations are sympathetic to Pope and Swift’s. Kathryn R. King argues that it is precisely at the site of the sublime that Haywood finds her most concentrated aesthetic concern. Haywood’s early narrative style “may be seen... as an attempt to translate into amatory fiction the effects of ‘the sublime,’ to represent the transporting effects of love in the medium of prose fiction.”<sup>8</sup> This concern with the affective transport of sexually-tinged narrative operates in contrast to the tragedies of pathos of the 1680s to the 1700s, promoting a closer affective identification between readers and the vicissitudes of plot. King clarifies that “Haywood used amatory fiction to express the ineffable bliss of sexual ecstasy. She moved the experience of the sublime into the realm of small, female, sexualized spaces, crafting melodramatic plots capable of projecting a range of extreme and unsettling states of mind – excesses...that show ordinary women filled with and exalted by the sexualized sublime” (265). Haywood, in prose fiction such as *Love in Excess* (1720), *The Rash Resolve* (1723), and *Fatal Fondness* (1725), produces what the century’s commentators would consider depictions of sexual enthusiasm, seduction, and rape, that were at best troublingly ambiguous, formally affective but related only uncertainly to the production

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<sup>8</sup> Kathryn R. King. “New Contexts for Early Novels by Women: The Case of Eliza Haywood, Aaron Hill, and the Hillarians, 1719–1725” in Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia, eds. *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 265.

of moral knowledge—these books did not seem to concern themselves with teaching readers how to act within the economies of the self required by modern life.

In *The Tea Table* (1725), Haywood would amplify this apparent amorality of the amorous narrative, proposing that “Love in itself cannot be considered either as a virtue, or a vice; it often, indeed, excites to both, but never changes the one to the other; there must be some secret Propensity in the soul, tho’ perhaps long (by the Prejudice of Education or some other motive) conceal’d, on which this Passion must work, and create Consequences, which without that aid, it would be impossible to bring to pass.”<sup>9</sup> Like the Longinian sublime, the amorous transports that form the affective heart of Haywood’s fictions are neither prescriptive nor predicated on stable identity formations (whether these are psychological, social, or economic), but rather imagine the effect of an aesthetic encounter between reader and text to be a sudden exchange, unanticipated, undelimited, artful in its apparent artlessness, its apparently natural intensity.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Eliza Haywood. *Selected works of Eliza Haywood. Vol I: Miscellaneous Writings, 1725-43* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), 84.

<sup>10</sup> For Longinus, sublime writing “does not persuade; it takes the reader out of himself.” The Loeb (Fyfe trans.) edition of the treatise reads “to transport them out of themselves.” See Longinus. *On Great Writing (On the Sublime)* trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1991), 9 and Aristotle: *The Poetics; “Longinus”: On the Sublime; Demetrius: On Style* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 125. As for the artful artlessness of the sublime, see my discussion of *Peri Bathous* in Chapter 1, above, and the Grube Longinus, in which, while “literary judgment is the last outgrowth of long experience,” and thus the product of craft or art, “the best use of a figure is when the very fact that it is a figure goes unnoticed,” which is to say, when its craft or art is concealed (9, 29).

fantasy of such an amorous encounter between reader and text finds itself unable to articulate a stable moral economy—its ethical dimension might be said to be not unlike that of the subjective transports of the amorous encounter described by Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* as a mode of unprescribed ethical openness.<sup>11</sup>

If the ethics of Haywood's early fiction is concerned with ecstasy rather than propriety, it could thus be said to extend and transform the Longinian theory of encounter between reader and text to the "transports" of sexual love, an aesthetic possibility not thoroughly engaged by Longinus, who mentions as one avenue to aesthetic transport "an invincible love for all that is great and more divine than ourselves" more prominently than erotic love. And in praising Sappho's poetry, Longinus focuses his concern on the way in which powerful emotion emerges as the product of organic aesthetic unity.<sup>12</sup> Of Longinus' treatment of Sappho, Neil Hertz observes that

It is clear that Longinus admires the poem [Sappho's] because when it becomes "like a living creature" and "finds its voice," it speaks of a moment of self-estrangement in language that captures the *disorganized* quality of the

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<sup>11</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 254-273.

<sup>12</sup> See Neil Hertz. *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 4ff for a discussion of Sappho's ode in Longinus' treatise.

experience. It would seem to be the moment itself that fascinates Longinus, the point where the near-fatal stress of passion can be thought of as turning into—as indistinguishable from—the energy that is constituting the poem. (Hertz 5)

Here in Longinus' treatment of Sappho is the closest to a theoretical articulation of the sublimity of erotic pathos produced by Haywood's fiction. Hertz finds the stress here on the "moment itself," something he does not generally acknowledge as a tendency for Longinus. But it is this moment, the *kairos* of the sublime, that I have stressed as the crucial element throughout, and with Haywood, as with Sappho, there is indeed an abiding concern with just such temporality—just such compression and intensification of momentary time—a production of a propitious present. Other critics in the Augustan moment who theorized the sublime generally failed to consider the connection between sexuality and sublime transport or sublime temporality—both John Dennis and Joseph Addison elevated the prominence of "all that is great and more divine than ourselves" in the theory of this mode of writing without addressing explicitly this Sapphic moment of Longinus' thought. Janet Todd notes that "[f]or Dennis, the source of sublimity was ultimately God, manifesting his power through a nature of vastness—volcanoes, earthquakes, lions, and wars."<sup>13</sup> Dennis bent this

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<sup>13</sup> Janet Todd. *Sensibility : An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 29.

sublimity of vastness to moral education, elaborating in *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704) a “psychology of passion, affect or feeling that stresses the role of feeling in cognitive insight and moral conviction.”<sup>14</sup> Dennis was concerned to ensure that sublime aesthetic experience could be recuperated by a moral economy. Addison, too, in Todd’s account, privileged “gigantic nature” and Miltonic grandeur in defining sublimity (29), proposing these as a pathway by which to access the moral benefits of a sense of the creator’s endless power.<sup>15</sup> These two prominent critics differ starkly from both the early Haywood and the Scriblerians in their concern to maintain moral understanding as the purposive design of sublime experience. Haywood is closer to the Scriblerians in her apparent tendency to depict sublime rapture as an experience that references an ethics beyond that of the economy of the Whig critics who were her contemporaries. But as scholars of Pope and the Augustan period know, Haywood is, by the time of Pope’s *The Dunciad* an object of literary ridicule for Pope, serving as an object of the contests in that poem’s mock-epic Lord Mayor’s Day.

See in the circle next, Eliza plac’d

Two babes of love close clinging to her waist (II.157-8)

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<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Barnouw. “The Morality of the Sublime: To John Dennis.” *Comparative Literature* 35.1 (1983): 31. See also *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* in Edward Niles Hooker, ed. *The Critical Works of John Dennis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939).

<sup>15</sup> See Neil Saccamano. “The Sublime Force of Words in Addison’s “Pleasures”.” *ELH* 58.1 (1991): 91.

I would argue that this difference with Haywood that Pope expresses by making her Curll's pissing-contest trophy is not merely personal—while Haywood had slandered Martha Blount in *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1724), the relationship between Pope, Swift, and Haywood is far more complex than one of personal disagreement.<sup>16</sup> Haywood had been highly sympathetic to the Tory opposition, and it is generally indicated that the “babes of love,” her scandal novels, were perceived by Pope and Swift as ultimately too pettily scandalous, too particular or gossip-like in their satiric method.<sup>17</sup> It is certainly the case that Scriblerian satire does not situate itself as scandal fiction, or as the satiric revelation of the amorous truths of secret courtly or political life. The difference between Scriblerian satire and Haywood's tales of romance and scandal, however, has yet to be adequately articulated, and it is an interrogation of the satiric concern with the sublime that would allow us to account for such divergence.

This difference is articulated perhaps most profoundly in scenes of rape or seduction in Scriblerian writing that articulate both a critique of Haywoodian ecstasy

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<sup>16</sup> See Maynard Mack. *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 411.

<sup>17</sup> For Haywood's politics, see Marta Kvande. “The Outsider Narrator in Eliza Haywood's Political Novels.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43.3 (2003): 628ff.

and satiric scandalmongering, and a rejection of the Rowean “she-tragedy” in which sexual violence is recuperated into a cognitive moral economy. At the same time these scenes or plots of Scriblerian sexual tension nevertheless gesture to an aesthetics of the sublime that, for Swift, Pope, and Gay, might avoid the pitfalls into which Haywood’s and Rowe’s methods lead. Most prominently, the difference is already anticipated in Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, a poem in which satiric reference hides its impact behind several layers of ambiguity and behind a concern for the energies of a virtualized social life that extends beyond any interest in particular events. *The Rape of the Lock* works to both parody and differ from “she-tragedy” in order to gesture toward a strategy of sublime intensity not available in that peripatetic form.

Here is how it happens, the rape. At the end of Canto III of Pope’s poem, the sylphs are armed for battle. They have been enlisted to expect the worst. As coffee ends, the Baron’s desire has been intensified by the liquid spirits—already an enthusiast of love, the Baron has reached a height of desire for Belinda’s jewel-like lock. Clarissa, to whom we realize the Baron has described his intention, provides the weapon. It is one of the few moments in the poem in which human agency is depicted by means of subjective attribution: “Just then, *Clarissa* drew with tempting Grace/A two-edg’d Weapon from her shining Case;” (III.127-8). Clarissa is the opponent of the great occasion produced by these revels, a naysayer regarding the wonders of the intensity of

beauty and the prolongation of desires.<sup>18</sup> Her action cuts through the fabric of the scene, as the Baron now positions the scissors at Belinda's neck, provided with his own subjective provenance by his proximity to Clarissa's. But as the rape occurs, the Baron's agency falls away. In the verse paragraph describing the cutting of the hair (and an unfortunate sylph) we witness a metamorphosis from apparently "real" subjective agency to, once more, a mode of action in which objects have animated the world with their own activity.

The Peer now spreads the glitt'ring *Forfex* wide,

T'inclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide.

Ev'n then, before the fatal Engine clos'd,

A wretched *Sylph* too fondly interpos'd;

Fate urg'd the Sheers, and cut the *Sylph* in twain,

(But Airy Substance soon unites again)

The meeting Points the sacred Hair dissever

From the fair Head, for ever and for ever! (III.147-154)

The sylphs are usually depicted as ineffectual in their duties, and with regard to Ariel's orders to intervene decisively on Belinda's behalf, they are. But here we can see

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 2 for my reading of the poem in terms of its concern with social intensities and prolongation of pleasure.

that the sylph's sacrifice actually works to translate subjective agency, attributed to the Baron, into the animation of virtual embodiments of human action—from the sylph, to "Fate," then finally the "Points" of the scissors. The sylph has served as a momentary sacrifice in the name of the virtuality of the social scene, and the poem registers the way in which the autonomous, autopoietic activity of the sylphs works to conserve itself, and the virtual realm of commodified activity that it promotes. The reactions of Belinda that follow come from just this realm of her commodified being: her eyes, screams, shrieks, all act, following the "assault," but not Belinda "herself," in distinction from these commodifications. She has been successfully protected from the most dangerous possibility of the scissors' or their holder's act.

The poem's quasi-joke regarding this rape scene ("any Hairs but these!" (IV.176)) indicates with some effort at shocking us that to Belinda, a real rape would have been better than the alteration of her head's hairscape. The fetishization of the elements of the virtual realm of commodities and metamorphoses results in an overvaluation of "trivial things." Just as with the inverted priorities of the poem's sidelong mention that "Wretches hang that Jury-men may Dine" (III.22), Belinda has, immersed in this virtual reality, come to overvalue the objects onto which social life has been displaced. Taken in this way, the plot of sexual assault is, for Pope, a plot that registers the very essence of modernity, a narrative of the ways in which the newly transformed landscape of social interactions functions with regard to a crisis that

threatens its coherence and stability. In the poem, the modern virtualized scene of social leisure metamorphoses what would be a forceful assault (or at best an attempt at seduction) by the amorous Baron into “the fantastic form of a relation between things.” But this assault brings with it the resonance of violence—despite the fact that it takes place on the plane of virtual interactions, preserved from “real” violence by the poem’s sylphs. And more importantly for the poem’s overall impact, the narrative of *The Rape of the Lock* is an indictment of the ways in which modern, virtualized subjectivity can ward off or deflect interpersonal (sexual) violence. At this moment of crisis in which an act of violence is perpetrated, the “system” of commodified relations transforms “real” violence into virtual violence that takes place “between things.” The poem withholds its full praise of this system of metamorphic deflection by showing Belinda’s response, her preference for a real rape, to be a product of the system of fetishization itself. The real fate of her body has become dangerously unimportant for the belle—she has become too enamored of her own virtualization. *The Rape of the Lock* praises a virtualized modernity, but depicts the dangers of a fetishization that ascribes equal value to chastity and coiffure—not to preserve a pre-virtual, pre-modern “real,” but to critique the hierarchy of value, or rather, the flattening of such hierarchy, encouraged by the modernity depicted in the poem.

Sublimity in *The Rape of the Lock* is captured by the intensity of the metamorphic social relations allowed by the thorough infiltration of social life by the

commodity fetish. But this situation of the sublime prevents both the pathos of tragic catharsis that would be available to readers or viewers of Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*, and the ecstatic identification with romantic love that allows for the satiric critique of masculine or mercenary social values in Haywood (for instance, in *The City Jilt*). In other words, unlike with Rowe and Haywood, we are to a great extent given a narrative that insulates us from sublime affect, even though the poem's topic seems to be the sublimity brought into interaction by artificial culture. Refusing us the catharsis of tragedy and the transports of *eros*, Pope uses this narrative of rape in the milieu of modernity to gesture towards the intensities of sublimity while depicting the failure of modern life to properly achieve a relation to sublime affect that could avoid becoming a fetish. The poem's metamorphic transformations indicate a commitment to an unachieved sublimity that would escape the stases of fetishism, that would not relinquish a dedication to sublime transport. This simultaneously negative (critical) and positive (gestural, hopeful) trajectory is common to much of the writing of Pope and his Scriblerian allies.

A poem in which the critique of sublimity is directed more explicitly toward the tragic fate of a woman whose struggle had been directed toward masculine, hereditary prerogative is Pope's "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" (1717). Two levels of sublime affect sandwich a critique of the unfeeling instrumentalism of a family's concern with economic lineage. The poem stages a moment of encounter with

the ghost of a self-murdered sufferer whose own sublime feelings of love were not accepted by those who sought to bend her exchangeable value as woman to their “ambition” (13).<sup>19</sup> This encounter’s sublime, chilling intensity is paralleled by the poet’s imagination of the intense moment of crisis that produced the bloody vision of death—the “bleeding bosom gor’d” that calls him to the unmarked grave (3). The ghost’s haunting is an echo of the pathos of the prior situation, the solitude in death that makes this elegy resemble a “she-tragedy” in its sympathies. The encounter’s intensities, proclaimed by the poet, produce no narrative of recognition, nor of any real investment in identification with the romantic anguish that preceded the suicide. The poem’s investments are with a critique of or anger at an ambitious instrumentalism, and the effects of the occasion of the ghostly encounter which opens up such a critique.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> Howard D. Weinbrot bases a detailed reading of the poem on the assertion that the figure of the poet is the lover who now blames himself (and her “uncle”) for the death of his beloved. In part this reading (which is certainly not implausible) is based on the curious repetition of the assertion that Pope himself was unlikely to have defended as noble the act of suicide that occasions the poem—this would be religiously heretical and morally troubling. Weinbrot argues that “[w]e must therefore conclude that these contradictions are signs, not of Pope as heretical and morally culpable, but of the speaker’s mind distraught with grief, rage, and—one suspects but cannot prove—guilt regarding his role in her death.” See his “Pope’s ‘Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady’” *Modern Language Quarterly* 32.3 (1971): 262. While I agree that this would be a somewhat troubling position for the poet to hold fast to, I do not share Weinbrot’s expectation of full biographical and doctrinal consistency, especially in a poem depicting the powerful emotions that surround the poet’s experience of the memory, haunting, and death of one who had suffered under execrable domination.

<sup>20</sup> For the best account of critical responses to the poem, and an examination of the way in which satirical (i.e. critical) form interacts with elegiac, as well as pastoral, in this poetic conjunction, see James Thompson’s essay “Pope’s *Unfortunate Lady* and Elegiac Form.” in Canfield and Hunter, eds. *Rhetorics of Order/Ordering Rhetorics in English Neoclassical Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 120-133.

echoing solitude in the poem is repeated again with the poet's final ruminations on his own part in the haunting, and, apparently because of this encounter and its profound effects, his own eventual solitary fate—a death that ends the cycle of echoing sublimity. What the poem means in this configuration of echoes—of ghostly haunting, emergent memory of injustice, and poetic remembrance until death—is unstated, left unclear.<sup>21</sup> Is the poem the memory that will outlive the poet's meager individual existence to stand as a memorial for the fallen unfortunate? The privacy of the images of the poem, the opacity that prevents a profound identification between reader and lady (or poet), produces a poem with all too uncertain future effect—it is not at all clear that the poem *could* serve as an effective memorial that would replicate the poet's own experience indefinitely.<sup>22</sup> The poem's foreclosure of its own purpose and of its own function within a moral economy leaves its readers with only the occasion itself, the scene in which we witness the poet's own experience of a memory that is only incompletely revealed to us.

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<sup>21</sup> Thompson writes that the *Elegy* “works self-consciously on difference, by foregrounding difference in the figure of his initial beckoning ghost, a sign of the Lady that is neither fully present nor absent, for the ghost serves to mark what was once present: bleeding and damaged, the ghost is not the Lady, but a sign that both differs and defers from the true presence, the once-living Lady” (125). I am fully in agreement with this assessment of the deconstructive tendency of Pope's poem (and of his writing in general), although my focus is different here in this brief reading—rhetorical and temporal rather than metaphysical (i.e. concerned with presence).

<sup>22</sup> Thompson notes that the Lady's “neglect can never be rectified, because the poet has no lasting power. Poetic recognition cannot return a life lost, and, worse, subsequent readers will never be able to remember a life that they never knew in the first place” (126).

Like Pope's satire, the poem's affective investment is in staging a moment of critique, an intense occasion that demands address. But the cycle of repetitions and the poem's own indication of the impotence of such a critique—the ultimate death of the memory and of the anger felt by the poet—force us back onto the poem's occasion itself. Given the affective trajectory of "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady," we are left with the unanswered demand for a sublimity that would properly echo the poem's depiction of intense encounter and the intensity of its private echo in the poet's own heart. The occasion staged by the poem is the presentation of such a demand, and it is this demand itself, ultimately unanswered by an echo, that emerges from the poem as its only future possibility, what is left to poem and to reader when critique fails, memory fades, and poet dies.

Pope's treatment of sexual and gendered violence is motivated strongly toward a critique of the instrumentalism and fetishism of the modernity that, as a figure demanding critique, emerges commonly in all of the Scriblerians' writings. But none of the poetry rests with this critique, which, if taken as the measure of the poetry's achievement, would itself be just such an instrumental aim, a fetish of negativity. Whether satiric or elegiac, there is a poetic dedication to sublime occasion (*kairos*) that the poetry recalls and returns to, the heightening of experience through such occasion that can serve as transporting encounter, even as that encounter is also occasioned by and the occasion for a negative critique of a scene of modern life that the poems work to

evoke. This is true as much for the satires as for the poems such as “Unfortunate Lady” and “Eloisa to Abelard.” When Scriblerian writing makes sexual violence its theme, it does so because this is a mode of crisis—of encounter between modern subjectivities, between subjectivity and modernity itself, or between modernity and an anti-modern aesthetic that always finds itself falling victim to the violent encroachment of the modern.

## **5.2. Parodies of Sexual Violence**

There are two prominent Scriblerian parodies of scenes of sexual violence that help to develop the thesis concerning the relationship between rape/seduction, modernity, and Scriblerian aesthetics. Perhaps the scene in Scriblerian writing in which we come the closest to a depiction of actual sexual violence is the bathing scene in *Gulliver’s Travels* where Gulliver is attacked by a female Yahoo, replaying a version of Ovid’s tale of Diana and Actaeon from the third book of the *Metamorphoses*. The rape of Gulliver is certainly a moment in which its narrator feels intensely vulnerable—face to face with the desire of the female, Gulliver confesses that “I was never in my Life so terribly frightened” (245). But here, unlike the pursuit of Lodona in *Windsor-Forest* or the virtualized violence of *The Rape of the Lock*, there is a physical assault. “She embraced me after a most fulsome manner; I roared as loud as I could, and the Nag came galloping towards me, whereupon she quitted her Grasp, with the utmost Reluctancy, and leaped

upon the opposite Bank, where she stood gazing and howling, all the time I was putting on my Clothes" (245). Gulliver's near approach to a sexual violation is certainly a parodic treatment of both the scene of rape and of the character who interprets himself as victim. As Susan Brownmiller has observed in her classic transhistorical account of sexual violence, the notion of a "retaliatory rape"—the return of rape for rape, female to male—is impossible, making sexual assault a uniquely masculine crime with no clear economics of justice and with uniquely feminine or feminizing consequences, whether these are physical or social in effect.<sup>23</sup> Gulliver's response of resistance—loudly roaring—performs the legal necessity of adequate resistance that allows him to maintain his distance from the act, to claim his resistance publicly, and to eject the act from what might be construed as a private sexual exchange—in other words, to adequately resist the rape in the eyes of the law.<sup>24</sup> Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver argue that "representations of rape after the event are almost always framed by a masculine perspective premised on men's fantasies about female sexuality and their fears of false accusation, as well as their codified access to and possession of women's bodies."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Brownmiller. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 16.

<sup>24</sup> See Susan Estrich's account of the legal treatment of consent, privacy, and the difficulties of defending the charge of rape in *Real Rape* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), 24ff.

<sup>25</sup> Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver. "Introduction" in *Rape and Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 2.

Gulliver knowingly reverses this set of representational problems, playing up the femininity of his position against the masculine resistances that question and undermine the representation of rape, attempting to establish both a distance from culpability and a legitimacy of victimization. This distance from the sexuality of the encounter also performs a crucial species distancing for Gulliver—in proclaiming himself victim he proclaims that he does not consent to being considered Yahoo, refusing to accede to the notion that there could be a consensual exchange with the Yahoo woman. Performing what to the law was, and is, in rape charges, often the lacking evidence of non-consent, Gulliver attempts to maximize his (species) distance from his assailant.

This attempt at distance backfires for Gulliver—regardless of his consent, those Houyhnhnms who witness or hear an account of the attack find that it conclusively proves what is, in a manner of speaking, his species-consent, his undeniable sexual exchangeability with Yahoos. “For now I could no longer deny, that I was a real *Yahoo*, in every Limb and Feature, since the Females had a natural Propensity to me as one of their own Species” (245). As in other Scriblerian moments, the moment of “real” encounter is deflected but replaced by a virtual layer of significance that means nearly everything to those involved (except to the Yahoo woman). Gulliver succumbs

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not to a rape but to an exchange that stands in for rape. He exchanges his status as critic of humanity for one of now-implicated hypocrite, unable to maintain the distance that provided him with a claim to innocence in the eyes of his captors. Ironically, this forced admission of identity with the Yahoos is one that makes Gulliver more modern than he was before—it will turn out that the behaviors of the Yahoos he describes are hardly to be fully distinguished from those of his countrymen that he narrates to his Master Houyhnhnm. The modern and the primitive are collapsed onto each other by the satire of the fourth voyage, and Gulliver fails to escape from this collapse despite his efforts to plead non-consent.

The other prominent parodic moment of sexual violence lies in the coterie's *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* in the absurd episode of the "Double Mistress." This vignette is a carnivalesque parody of the captivity and seduction narrative that entered the British novel from Mary Rowlandson and French Orientalism (Galland, Prevost) and was made popular by Haywood and exhausted by Richardson. Charles Kirby-Miller also notes that the high strains of romantic affect are parodic references to heroic plays such as Nathaniel Lee's *Sophinisha* and John Dryden's *Tyrranick Love*.<sup>26</sup> It is also, as Dennis Todd and Kirby-Miller both chronicle, a fictionalization of a real-life London

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander Pope. *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 294n1.

exhibit that attracted “huge crowds and inspire[ed] enthusiastic handbills.”<sup>27</sup> Lindamira and Indamora are twins who enjoy separate torsos but share the same lower body, including sexual organs. Martin, falling madly in love with Lindamora, engages himself to rescue the pair from their captivity in a London sideshow. It is the other twin Indamora who burns for Martin, however, and this love triangle leads to a difficult conclusion for all involved. Fighting through a mountain lion and a Manteger (“man-tiger” —usually a baboon), the latter of which, in the middle of a rescue attempt, becomes the sexual assailant of the two women.

The Manteger, who for his gentleness was allowed to walk at large in the house, was so heightened at this sight, that he rushed upon Indamora like a barbarous Ravisher. Indamora cried aloud for help. Martin flew to revenge this insolent attempt of a Rape on his wedding-day. The lustful Monster, driven from our double Lucrece, fled into the middle of the room, pursued by the valorous and indignant Martin. (152)

An epic struggle ensues which, like much of narration in the *Memoirs*, flings esoteric reference after reference at us in a continuing effort to generate the neoclassical grandeur

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<sup>27</sup> See Dennis Todd. *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 129-139 and Charles Kirby-Miller’s notes (307-310) in the Scriblerian *Memoirs*.

of the book's hero Martin. Saving the duo from the man-tiger, Martin carries her from the house of her captivity and marries Lindamira that very evening (153).

But saving Lindamira/Indamora from rape by the Manteger finds Martin met with a lawsuit from their former captor, the sideshow master. In a burlesque of the legal machinations that might accompany such a conflict, the text turns to a performance of rhetorical subterfuge on the part of Randal (the show-master) and the law that satirizes and critiques the legal definition of subjectivity and the vexing legal ruses that put into place seemingly arbitrary definitions about property, self-determination, theological identity, and sexual relations. Todd writes that "[a]ll of these debates are unresolvable, and they are unresolvable because the very systems of definition and determination (law, theology, metaphysics) implode when confronted with the enigma of Lindamira-Indamora" (131). More than merely a frustration and critique of the concept of identity, as Todd so successfully argues, the "Double Mistress" chapter of the memoirs creates a sense of deep dissatisfaction with legal and theological delineations of all instances of intersubjective involvement (not merely individual personal identity or the question of the location of the soul) in which what is proposed is that "*One is Two*" (as Dr. Leatherhead, one of the disputants argues) or that two are one. Instead, as the suits result in the dissolution of Martin's marriage, the satiric impetus has organized itself around the failures of the legal definition of that individuality that can, *qua* individual, take part in legally- and theologically-sanctioned sexual relationships (matrimony, and

not “Bigamy, Rape, or Incest” (*Memoirs* 161)). A play on the way in which two can become one, and one can become two, this absurd burlesque of the failures of institutional definition portrays the modern moment of legal complexity and the modern achievement of the synthesis of all ancient learning as the occasion for the complete befuddlement of a conjugal relationship, whether it is between one and one, two and one, or two and two. But more powerfully than the occasion of the modern crux of learning here is the occasion of that “liminal creature” (Todd 133) Lindamira-Indamora whose existence brings into being the satiric critique and who represents the chapter’s gesture toward a kind of being or subjectivity that would, in spite of the ways in which modern learning attempted to entrap it, produce in viewers, lovers, or readers a kind of wonder that escapes, for a moment, the failures this wonder occasions. Inasmuch as the *Memoirs* allows Lindamira-Indamora to be a sublime “monster,” or a transporting lover, she/they is/are a marker for the sublimity that fascinates Scriblerian satire across its manifestations. The female duo remains here only briefly something more than an absurd occasion for the failure of these defining discourses—Scriblerian satire refuses to allow an image of the sublime to persist for long. It is far too indebted to skepticism and iconoclasm to allow what it gestures to as the force at the heart of an aesthetic encounter to take stable and reified form.

The parodies of sexualized violence that find occasional form in Scriblerian writing seem to culminate in the cynical parody of the legal ramifications of (and the

corruption surrounding) the charge of rape performed in Henry Fielding's *Rape Upon Rape* (1730), which was occasioned by the notoriety of the Walpole ally Francis Charteris, the so-called "Rapemaster General of Great Britain."<sup>28</sup> Fielding's play explores the poor match between the problem of sexual violence and the law, a situation that has encouraged the emergence of an exploitative legal treatment of both rape victims and their assailants. Two gallant rakes are imprisoned for rapes they didn't commit (although one of the two, Ramble, may have wished to try), and face the extortion of a corrupt judge Squeezum. The play's comic plot is taken up with the revenge had on this justice and the romantic liaison that emerges from the genuine consensual relationships that form out of the situation of the imprisonment for false charges. Charteris, who had been imprisoned but then pardoned for the charge of raping his maidservant, was widely thought (especially by opposition and Tory-leaning writers like Pope and Fielding) to represent the corrupt system of law and political influence at work in the Walpole administration.<sup>29</sup> As a critique of justice and the abuses of power—the ethical bankruptcy of a false and pecuniary sublime—Fielding's play shares a great deal with Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and Fielding's own *Jonathan Wild*. The narration of rape is

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<sup>28</sup> See Bertrand A. Goldgar. "The Politics of Fielding's 'Coffee-House Politician.'" *Philological Quarterly*, 49:3 (July 1970), 424.

<sup>29</sup> See Thomas Lockwood's introduction to the play in Henry Fielding. *Plays*. ed. Thomas Lockwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 413.

shown to be a matter only for those who claim the privilege of holding legal and political authority. The charge of rape is depicted as a legal recourse that only serves those whose political positions allow them to profit from the law. Fielding's play could be said to be a parody of the tragic power of Rowe's "she-tragedies," and is likewise a pessimistic judgment on the possibility for the question of sexual violence to receive more than superficial treatment in the hands of justice. John Arbuthnot wrote a scathing epitaph on Charteris in 1732, a clear attempt to counteract any perspective on the infamous man that might interpret his life as one of adventure or gallantry. "He was the only person of his time/Who could cheat without the mask of honesty," wrote Arbuthnot, condemning Charteris in much the same terms as Gay and Fielding had already begun to condemn Walpole.<sup>30</sup> The figure of rape was useful for these political charges, and for this critique of the mercenary tendencies of modernity—but this method of its use tends to evacuate its force in something of the way of its parodic representation in *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Memoirs*. To consider more fully the ways in which the major moments of Scriblerian treatment of sexual violence interact with a conjunction of aesthetic and ethical questions, we must look forward to the revision of

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<sup>30</sup> George Atherton Aitken. *The Life and Works of John Arbuthnot* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 138.

these themes in the novels of Richardson, and what the treatment of sexual violence and seduction in *Clarissa* means if we hold the Scriblerians in mind.

### **5.3. A Scriblerian Lovelace?**

You must by all means read Dr. Young's new 'Conjectures on Original Composition' and let it deter you, when you have finished Ovid, from engaging in any more translation.

-- William Shenstone to Dr. Percy<sup>31</sup>

If *The Rape of the Lock* sets into motion a virtual social landscape, an endless chain of metamorphoses that release and prolong affective energies, then we might ultimately ask why it is that the Scriblerians do not ultimately move beyond the masterful yet petty Belinda to depict a true hero of the virtual, a master of artifice and seduction who can wield metamorphosis after metamorphosis in order to achieve a thoroughly sublime subjectivity, a rhetorical genius who might take the sophistic manipulations of *kairos* and sublimity to their limits, beyond the moral economy of good and evil. In other words, why do the Scriblerians not imagine a character with the capabilities of Richardson's

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Martin William Steinke. *Edward Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition" in England and Germany* (New York: F. C. Stechert co., 1917), 15.

Lovelace as the new mode of subjectivity that can navigate successfully the crises of modernity, who can resist being conscripted by all instrumentalizing claims and who can craft aesthetically a persona that can resist all dogmatic identifications and perform radical iconoclasm at will? Why, if the Scriblerians' combination of skepticism and sublimity seem to demand that a new kind of aesthetic subjectivity emerge from the ashes of Dulness and duncehood, do we finally gather nothing but the absurd pedantry of Scriblerus, the sullen disillusionment of Gulliver, the moral perfection of Blount and Burlington, the always-already fading echoes of sublimity of Gay's Macheath?

One connection we must traverse in order to complicate the question of a Scriblerian Lovelace is the sympathy between arch-rake and Ovidian metamorphosis. Terry Eagleton observes of Lovelace that "his writing is less the mirror of the self than the very stage on which it plays out its self-delighting metamorphoses."<sup>32</sup> And Terry Castle agrees with this assessment of the character's essential malleability, writing that Clarissa "becomes increasingly unable to 'make out' her duplicitous companion—a veritable 'Proteus' of disguise and transformation, a magus who can alter at will the shape of what she sees."<sup>33</sup> Lovelace revels in his own skills at artifice, indicating to his

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<sup>32</sup> Terry Eagleton. *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 53.

<sup>33</sup> Terry Castle. *Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning & Disruption in Richardson's "Clarissa"* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 90.

confidant Belford that “Ovid was not a greater master of metamorphoses than thy friend [Lovelace].”<sup>34</sup> Stage-managing every aspect of Clarissa’s existence, Lovelace is both sublime *and* suitably pathetic when he needs to be, transforming himself and those around him when he desires to advance his plot. Here, too, as in Pope’s poem of rape, the movement towards the crisis of the act of violence works to eject forcefully all involved from the haze of virtual play—Clarissa, who had been ambivalent about this prospect at the beginning, is, by the time of the rape, already disillusioned of any pretensions to a positive resolution, to a return to the marriage plot that had determined her life before her escape. The event itself, however, effectively ends what to Lovelace is a game of virtual metamorphic manipulation. It is not quite that Clarissa is returned from the artifice of seduction to some natural “real” as she begins her tragic journey towards death. Jean Baudrillard argues of narratives of seduction that these articulate a mode of artifice that distances any access to the real as such, and this is certainly the case in *Clarissa*—“The law of seduction takes the form of an uninterrupted ritual exchange where seducer and seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that never ends.”<sup>35</sup> The question of the end of the game is important here as in *The Rape of the Lock*—while the

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<sup>34</sup> Richardson, Samuel. *Clarissa, or, The history of a Young Lady* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 412. I use the Penguin edition because it is the only readily available instance of the first edition, which was closest to the time of the Augustans in its original publication.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Baudrillard. *Seduction*. trans. Brian Singer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 22.

denouement of Richardson's novel moves away from the machinations of the seducer's cunning and artifice, and from the resistances of the paragon, the echoes of the rules of the game of seduction still blanket whatever real, uncodified possibilities for free behavior we might imagine once existed. To this extent, Terry Castle's reading of the text is appropriate: the violence of the overcoding of the rules of the game of seduction undermines and overwrites the notion of self-willed, autonomous desire with which Clarissa begins the text. Lovelace weaves an intricate set of rules and limits out of an already artificial accumulation of seductive knowledge: "For Lovelace, language (and soon enough, all secondary codes of significance too) is thus not a re-presentation of experience, but experience itself. Nothing, apart from other pieces of language—the great interlocking system of texts that he has read—has the power to control one's use of the code of meaning" (86).

But Castle's reading of Richardson's novel misconstrues the scene of seduction precisely in the way that readings of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* misunderstand the role of Clarissa or of the shadowy love Belinda hides in her heart. Lovelace's manipulation of social relations into the form of a seductive game—a contest or agon whose rules are semi-autonomous and not mimetic with relation to some quotidian existence—does not acquire for him a mastery of his object. It is in this sense that Lovelace is as much a proponent of a Longinian sublime as is Belinda. The game into which Lovelace projects his victim also encompasses him—the sublimity that playing by the rules of this game of

seduction acquires for Lovelace is not a sublimity of mastery, but of the claims to greatness and the unsettling transports that can, for Longinus, only come from a subaltern position, a position that has resulted from the concession to a kind of powerlessness in the face of a destabilizing encounter between subjectivities. Lovelace is himself a victim of his own brinksmanship, and he admits, even struggles with, this powerlessness throughout the plot.<sup>36</sup> Castle's tendency throughout her reading of the text is to indicate that the hermeneutic violence enacted by Lovelace is to denature Clarissa, to remove her from the real state of autonomy and self-determination that serves as a baseline for a just and legitimate subjectivity. Her tendency is to hint that the distance between Lovelace's seductive construction and this "real" is criminal, a violent imposition of interpretation onto the innocent foundation of nature. Lovelace is, for Castle, a sophist, a thoroughly literary dissembler whose destabilized and destabilizing relation to truth—his desire for the game of seduction—is always potentially violent, always a threat to the stable order of nature that protects subjectivity.

Neither Lovelace nor his Clarissa finds this to be the case, however—indeed, what the trials of seduction and her irrevocable entry into Lovelace's game seems to

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<sup>36</sup> For instance, Lovelace ascribes to his "*conscience*" the following lines of turmoil to Belford: "As I hope to live, I am sorry at the present writing, that I have been such a foolish plotter as to put it, as I fear I have done, out of my *own power* to be honest. I hate compulsion in all forms; and cannot bear, even to be *compelled* to be the wretch my choice has made me!" (848). This scene ends with the imaginary slaying of his conscience.

teach Clarissa, or at least to teach us, is that there is no base state of unblemished selfhood, no space from which the subject might enact autonomy. All actors in the text are ultimately determined by their socioeconomic positions, the environmental limits and the pathways allowed to them by status, income, and decorum. The nostalgia with which Clarissa begins her admission into the power of Lovelace, her regret in the early stages of his handling of her, quickly becomes a thorough pessimism that admits that, for one who would cling to the notion of autonomous subjectivity, there is no way back, no way out of the game. Everything always already *is* seduction in Richardson's novel—it takes no postmodern scene of the precession of simulacra for us to pronounce that once seduction takes hold it brings all into its sway. All becomes game, and whatever element of the "real" (Baudrillard names this the "law," the *logos*)<sup>37</sup> persists is itself, too, indistinguishable from a construction of the game's rules. For Castle, the process of reading this account of seduction educates us into loss: "[w]e become aware that we are at a potentially dangerous remove from truth, cut off from an apparent actuality, the authentic letter" (159). This sense of loss is certainly a palpable presence in the novel, from the melancholy that follows the physical rape for the two main characters to the melancholic ethical devotion undertaken by Belford through the last third of the novel.

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<sup>37</sup> "The game's sole principle, though it is never posed as universal, is that by choosing the rule one is delivered from the law" (133).

The loss is not subject to mourning, however, because if the novel's plot of seduction and demise is to be understood in terms of loss, there is no escape from the melancholy such loss would carry with it. The melancholy of the denouement of *Clarissa* is a powerfully pessimistic treatment of the possibility of eschewing the virtual game of seduction in order to dwell in some real space from which subjectivity might achieve its modern apotheosis. For Richardson's novel, subjectivity is always already an effect of the game of seduction: the fantasy of a lost autonomy, the nostalgia for a lost familial intimacy, the melancholy of the loss of naturalizing law in the name of virtualizing rules.<sup>38</sup>

Richardson's novel is a prescient refutation of the notion of masculine sublimity that Burke will describe in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). That treatise articulates a sublimity that separates aesthetic subject from aesthetic object, and masculine power and grandeur from feminine docility and beauty. Richardson's Lovelace yearns for this sublimity of

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<sup>38</sup> Eagleton argues, and asks, "Clarissa implicitly poses to political society a question which shakes it to the roots: can truth and power be compatible? Can one trust simply to the 'literal' truth of one's discourse and discount its mystifying effects? Or can one falsehood be countered only by another more fruitful falsehood, which in shifting the balance of power in one's favour may bring a deeper demystification to birth? Can those who are stripped of power from the outset, excluded by the rules of discourse from full subjecthood, enter the power game at all without being instantly falsified?" (79). I would argue that rather than posing a question in this way, the novel embodies the separation between truth and power, allowing the sublime game of seduction to enact a thorough separation between individual subjects and any kind of truth or power. Both truth and power are thus allowed to be experienced (for us) as *effects* of the virtualizing game.

mastery, of aesthetic distance, aesthetic power. But he repeatedly reinserts himself into the game of seduction that both allows him the very fantasy of mastery that articulates his goals and limits him to abiding by the rules of seduction. The rape is the aporetic moment of exception to this embedded entanglement, the moment in which Lovelace violates the limits of the game in order to grasp at masculine sublimity beyond the boundaries of seduction. Lovelace's movement toward it is as much a product of the course of decisions he has undertaken in his game of seduction, decisions that he represents as gradually narrowing his ability to determine the outcome. As the plot advances, we can see less and less of the Lovelace who might fit the mold of what will be called the Burkean sublime and more of a man whose sublime generation and metamorphosis of his own character has followed the rules of a game against an opponent who has successfully resisted him until the very end. At the point just prior to the rape, he has become utterly frustrated by Clarissa's own powers, offering her the label of a proto-Burkean sublimity, and confessing his own weakness. "How great, how sublimely great, this creature!" (853). As Michel Deguy notes, "[t]he sublime measures our failure."<sup>39</sup> Lovelace vacillates between what Pope would call a ruling passion—his absolute devotion to rakish misogyny—and his submission to the transports provided

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<sup>39</sup> Michel Deguy. "The Discourse of Exaltation: Contribution to a Rereading of Pseudo-Longinus." trans. Jeffrey S. Librett. in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 7.

by the game of seduction that can provide only the grandeur of a certain failure: a failure to grasp power, a failure to defraud the game itself of its ability to create sublimity. The fact that he will take the step that determines him finally in the favor of the former, in the favor of his obsessive commitment to profligacy and self-determination, means that Lovelace rejects the Longinian sublime, its aesthetic transports, in favor of that non-discursive power and autonomy that the rhetorical operation of the sublime has perhaps itself allowed to flourish. From the perspective of the Longinian sublime, Lovelace believes too dogmatically in that greatness that his immersion in the rhetorical struggles of seduction allows him to glimpse in the first place.

What does this allow us to say about Clarissa's resistance, her commitments to the foundation of natural ethics that she constructs over the course of the novel? It is primarily in the novel's resonances with the tale of Job that this greatness make most sense—Clarissa is the sufferer whose obstinacy in the face of absolute destitution demands only some future justice, and some advocate to stand in for the sufferer at some future moment of redemption.<sup>40</sup> Cousin Morden and then, after the crisis, Belford fulfill the role of (hoped-for) advocate for Clarissa. But in this Job-like adherence to

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<sup>40</sup> The British eighteenth century was a period of intense engagement with the biblical Book of Job. See Jonathan Lamb. *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), esp. Chapter 11.

suffering and the hope of redemption, Clarissa also remains committed to an opposition to what she has come to identify as Lovelace's rhetorical strategies. This difference between them always to some extent exists, but her dedication to it is multiplied by Lovelace's attempt, during the staged fire, to extend his physical liberties beyond that which she or propriety would allow. Clarissa's naturalism, her opposition to artifice, maintains a position of critical dissonance that prevents the strategies and components of Lovelace's seduction plot from synthetically dissembling their own production of a finished, artful, and mimetic narrative. Rather than producing the sublime achievement of the art that successfully hides its own art, Lovelace's methods are gradually torn apart, their machinery revealed, so that he finds himself less and less able to hope to achieve a sublime artifice. Lovelace's failure to adhere to his own production of a sublime aesthetics of seduction, in conjunction with Clarissa's naturalistic resistance to all such production (once she is able to articulate such a position) drive the artificial trappings of the situation to their dissolution. The novel's denouement—Clarissa's preparations for death—indicate the failure of both the naturalist critique *and* the production of sublimely artful artifice. If both these fail, what is Richardson's remaining aesthetic proposal? And how does it differ from the remainder produced by Scriblerian satire?

The aesthetic and ethical ramifications of the treatment of the Longinian sublime to be found in Richardson's *Clarissa* are amplified by Edward Young's *Conjectures on*

*Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (1759).<sup>41</sup> Here, in an open letter to Richardson, Young proposes an aesthetics of the sublime that distances itself radically from the Scriblerians (especially and pointedly Swift and Pope) in a new intervention in the battle or quarrel of the ancients and moderns.<sup>42</sup> Attacking the aesthetics of imitation that dominated the first half of his century, Young proposes that only original genius—that which boldly moves beyond admission of the greatness of the past, claiming for itself an individualist ascendancy—can achieve sublimity. “Learning we thank, genius we revere; that gives us pleasure, this gives us rapture; that informs, this inspires, and is itself inspired; for genius is from heaven, learning from man” (52). Young’s genius claims itself to be a further advance in iconoclasm, critiquing the Scriblerian satiric and imitative aesthetics as too indebted to the idolatry of the ancients. Genius, while from heaven, comes as purely individual and protestant divine enthusiasm, and in its appearance and sublimity, shows that imitation is false worship of Catholic icons: “While the true genius is crossing all public roads into fresh

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<sup>41</sup> I use Martin William Steinke’s scholarly edition of the text that can be found appended to his essay *Edward Young’s “Conjectures on Original Composition” in England and Germany*. New York: F. C. Stechert Co., 1917.

<sup>42</sup> Steinke notes Warton’s commentary observes that Young’s letters were believed to have been “written in replay to Pope’s declaration that nothing remains to the moderns but to recommend their productions by the imitation of the ancients” (3). Certainly, as Steinke opines, Warton’s *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756) were of greatest negative influence on Young’s *Conjectures*. For further biographical details about Young’s relationship with Warton, Cibber, Hill, and Richardson himself, see Steinke, 4ff.

untrodden ground, he, up to the knees in antiquity, is treading the sacred footsteps of great examples with the blind veneration of a bigot saluting the papal toe" (57). Edward Young's address to Richardson is a thorough reframing of the concept of the sublime, turning away from Longinus as a source of false consciousness, and toward a further intensification of the individual, and toward rhetorics of anti-scholasticism, anti-Catholicism, and naturalism.

Both Lovelace and Clarissa in Richardson's novel yearn toward this notion of natural, divine, iconoclastic genius. Each produces, in a projection toward the other, an aesthetics that attempts to formulate just such a version of individuality in contrast to servile imitation, in contrast to the imitative versions of the concept of the sublime. Clarissa's model, that of the independent, ethical paragon, is naturalistic, intensely iconoclastic, and thoroughly modern. Lovelace's corresponding persona is, as Castle notes, thoroughly literary—at base, a production of what he knows through what we could more or less call scholarship. But the plot of the novel sees Lovelace rebelling against what might have been an imitative and game-bound aesthetics of seduction, repeatedly rejecting calls by those around him (and by Belford) to find a mode of sublime expression that would fit within the game's limits. In a sense, we might say that it is Clarissa who teaches Lovelace to no longer bend his knee to the rules of engagement—this does not exonerate the rake, whose actions the novel clearly finds morally abhorrent. But unlike Young's depiction of Swift who, in his career, "stumbled

at the threshold, and set out for distinction on feeble knees" (51), Lovelace and Clarissa both set out to avoid genuflection, attempting to construct an aesthetics of the self, and of encounter, that for the reader is the essence of the shifts in orientation that occur during the first half of the novel.

This is to say that Richardson's *Clarissa* represents a moment in which the Longinian sublime is succumbing to pressures that make it both implausible as the foundation of an aesthetic theory and untenable as a proposal for an ethical relationship between reader and writer or text. Edward Young charts this change theoretically, and Richardson's novel allows us to witness, through the dissolution of the relations of seduction, virtue, contract, and kinship, the way in which the individualism that emerges on both sides allows the plot to find itself inexorably caught up in sexual violence. The reverse of the virtuality of Pope's *Rape* that preserves and prolongs social metamorphoses, Lovelace's rape of Clarissa is the aesthetic and ethical rejection of the buffer of all such virtuality in the name of a code that Young will call originality or genius, but which we might call autonomy, freedom, or self-determination. This zero-point of aesthetic iconoclasm represents the death-knell of Scriblerian satire, which, as I have argued throughout this project, held out above and beyond all negativity the most fervently devoted hope that literary writing could ground an ethics by way of aesthetics. In the development of the individualist realism of the novel and in the conception of

aesthetic genius heralded by Young, this hope is erased and silenced by an ascendant modernism.

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## Biography

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